DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 349 HE 020 584

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TITLE National Study of Teaching Assistants.
INSTITUTION Syracuse Univ., N.Y. Center for Instructional Development.
PUB DATE Jan 87
NOTE 83p.
AVAILABLE FROM Syracuse University, Center for Instructional Development, (Robert M. Diamond), 111 Waverly Avenue, Suite 220, Syracuse, NY 13244-2320 ($8.00).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Background; Foreign Students; Higher Education; National Surveys; Questionnaires; Research Universities; *Supervision; *Teacher Responsibility; *Teaching Assistants; Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

The background, responsibilities, and preparation of teaching assistants (TAs) from a representative group of eight U.S. research institutions were studied in 1986. The questionnaire covered: demographic information about TAs (e.g., academic department, highest level of education, county of origin, gender); teaching responsibilities (e.g., lecturing, grading, advising); preparation for teaching; and orientation or training that foreign TAs might have received and problems they have encountered. Questionnaires were completed by 1,357 TAs, 68% of whom were teaching in disciplines generally classified as the arts and sciences. Seventeen percent of the TA respondents were foreign students, and 45% were from Asian countries. Findings include: one of every three TAs was fully responsible for a course including lecturing, grading, and counseling; nearly half of all TAs had taught previously and three out of four hoped to teach after they had received their degrees; one in 25 did not have the appropriate academic background for their assignment and one in six was teaching outside their discipline; and one in five women reported less adequate guidance and support than men. The questionnaire is appended. (SW)

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NATIONAL STUDY OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

ROBERT M. DIAMOND
AND
PETER GRAY

With the support
of
Scott Clark and Thomas Moore

JANUARY 1987

CENTER FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

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This report is available from The Center for Instructional Development, Syracuse University,]]] Waverly Avenue, Syracuse, New York 13244 (price $8.00).

January 1987

The Center for Instructional Development, Syracuse University
111 Waverly Avenue, Syracuse, New York 13244-2320

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express our appreciation to the representatives of the participating institutions who made this study possible: Winifred Anderson, The University of California at Davis; Ruth Christy Funk, Syracuse University; Libby Gardner, Texas A&M University; W. Lee Humphreys, The University of Tennessee; Larry Loehrer, UCLA; Michele Marincovich, Stanford University; Dean Osterman, Oregon State University, and Delivee Wright, The University of Nebraska; to Thomas Moore for the development of the graphics used throughout this report, and to Scott Clark for his programming assistance.

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	The Sample	5
III.	Background for their Assignments	21
IV.	Adequacy of Time	29
V.	Guidance and Supervision	35
VI.	Areas of Responsibility	43
VII.	Written Comments	57
VIII	Observations and Recommendations	59
Appendix A - Questionnaire		65
Appendix B - Representative Comments		69

List of Tables

#	TITLE	PAGE
1	Population Surveyed	5
2	Respondents by Major Departments	6
3	Respondents by Major Academic Area	7
4	Respondents by Gender, Citizenship & Country of Origin	14
5	Gender of Respondents by Academic Discipline	15
6	Respondents by Degree Sought	16
7	Respondents by Teaching Situation	16
8	Prior Teaching Experience	17
9	Planning to Teach by Discipline	18
10	Years As a Teaching Assistant	19
11	Adequacy of Academic Background by Gender	22
12	Teaching in Discipline by Gender	23
13	Adequacy of Academic Background by Citizenship	24
14	Teaching in Discipline by Citizenship	25
15	Adequacy of Academic Background by Discipline	26
16	Teaching in Discipline by Discipline	27
17	Adequacy of Academic Background by Major Departments	28
18	Teaching in Discipline by Major Departments	28
19	Enough Time by Gender	30
20	Enough Time by Gender. Departments of English	31
21	Enough Time by Citizenship	31
22	Enough Time by Discipline	32
23	Enough Time by Major Departments	32
24	Enough Time by Years of Experience	33
25	Adequate Guidance by Gender	36
26	Adequate Guidance by Citizenship	37
27	Adequate Guidance by Discipline	38
28	Adequate Guidance by Major Departments	39
29	Adequate Guidance by Years of Experience	40
30	Responsibility and Adequacy of Supervision by Years of Experience	41
31	Responsibility & Adequacy of Supervision by Assignment (Parts I, II, III)	44-46
32	Availability of Support Programs	51
33	Training Provided, International Students	52
34	Areas in Which More Preparation is Desired	53
35	Had Preparation/Want Preparation by Area (Parts I, II, III)	54-56
36	Written Comments - By Category & Institution	58

I. Introduction

Teaching assistants are not only responsible for a major portion of undergraduate lower division instruction at most major research universities but they are also the potential faculty members of tomorrow. Unfortunately, there is a general perception that the teaching performance of many teaching assistants is poor. To reduce or eliminate this problem, a growing number of institutions are developing programs to orient and prepare teaching assistants for their roles as discussion leaders, graders, advisors, and so on. In addition, a number of research universities are implementing special programs for their international teaching assistants that focus specifically on the needs of this population. Although many institutions have programs of one sort or another, most are optional; and although some academic departments require their own or new teaching assistants to participate in the all-university program, these are the exceptions. In addition, there has been little effort to evaluate these programs, to identify which approaches are effective and which are not, or to evaluate their overall impact on teaching and learning. While there is growing concern about the impact of teaching assistants on the quality of lower division teaching, little is known about the perceptions of the teaching assistants themselves or of recommendations they might have for improving their effectiveness. This study was designed to answer these questions.

The objective of the study was to assess the background, responsibilities, and preparation of teaching assistants (TAs) from a representative group of research institutions across the country. The outcomes were designed (I) to give us a better understanding of TAs, their

roles, and their needs, (II) to identify areas in which differences might exist between institutions, and (III) to develop for the first time a normative base of data against which other institutions could compare their own data. It also became apparent that data of this nature could serve as a critical base for evaluation purposes as institutions implemented new TA support programs.

Approximately ten years ago, Cashell (1977) conducted a survey of nearly 1,000 graduate teaching assistants (TAs) at Syracuse University. The findings indicated that two-thirds of the TAs at that time lacked any formal preparation in lecturing, preparing tests, counseling students, and leading discussions. More recent studies by Smock and Menges (1985), Bingman (1983), and Wright (1981) clearly indicate that this situation is not unique to Syracuse University nor is it of only historical interest. In fact, a very recent survey of administrators of 400 institutions conducted by The Ohio State University (1986) shows that 60% of the administrators have a "very high interest" in the area of TA employment and education. Furthermore, the administrators ranked "preparing TAs in pedagogical skills" as the most important topic among a large number of teaching assistant related items.

The survey that was developed was based on the original Syracuse University instrument with a number of modifications being made on recommendations from the participating institutions. The final instrument consisted of five parts (see Appendix A). I. asked demographic information about the TAs (e.g., academic department, highest level of education, country of origin, gender). II. focused on their teaching responsibilities (e.g., lecturing, grading, advising). III. included questions about their preparation for teaching, including whether they were teaching in their

discipline, if they had enough time to adequately fulfill their teaching responsibilities, whether their institution has provided programs of support, and whether they have held any other teaching positions. In addition, in this section TAs were asked to specify the pedagogical areas in which they have had preparation and those areas where they would like additional training. Section IV. focused on any additional orientation or training that international TAs might have received and on any unique problems they had as international students. The last section, V., asked for general comments or suggestions.

The survey form was designed so that the respondents only had to fold and secure the form and drop it in the mail.

Nine major reports have been developed from the data that were collected. A general summary report (this document) and individual reports for each of the eight participating institutions were prepared and distributed. These campus-specific reports included detailed information not contained in this summary and a reprint of all the written comments from their participating TAs with their departments identified. In addition, collaborating institutions were advised as to which code letter in the summary data represented their institution. In respect for the privacy of the participating universities, comments in this report are reported by discipline only.

References

Cashell, J.. G. (1977, May). Survey results from graduate assistants 1976-1972. Syracuse, NY, Center for Instructional Development.

Bingman, R.M. (1983). Use of student evaluations to improve instruction. A paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Toronto, Ontario. ED 232580.

National TA Conference Planning Committee (1986). TA needs assessment questionnaire results. Columbus, OH. The Ohio State University, Instructional Development and Evaluation Center.

Smock, R. and Menges, R. (1985, June). Programs for TAs in the context of campus politics and priorities. New Directions for Teaching and Learning; (Strengthening the learning assistant faculty). No. 22, pp. 21-33.

Wright, D.C. (1981). Integrating GTA training programs with faculty development. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Los Angeles. Ed. 2021278.

II. The Sample

Surveys were distributed near the end of the spring semester or quarter of 1986 to 4230 graduate teaching assistants at eight participating major research institutions with an overall return rate of 32% (1357). In all but one instance the surveys were returned by mail directly to the Center for Instructional Development at Syracuse University. Four institutions surveyed all of their teaching assistants, two surveyed 100% of the assistants in selected departments, while two (G & H) distributed them to a smaller representative sample (Table 1).

TABLE 1

POPULATION SURVEYED

Institution*	Surveys Distributed (rounded to the nearest 10)	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
A	900	299	(33)
B	740	279	(38)
C	1000	226	(23)
D	500	199	(40)
E	700	183	(26)
F	250	117	(47)
G	80	30	(38)
H	60	24	(40)
TOTAL	4230	1357	(32)

* INSTITUTIONS ARE CODED FROM HIGHEST TO LOWEST NUMBER OF RESPONSES

INSTITUTIONS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER ARE: OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY, STANFORD UNIVERSITY, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, TEXAS A & M, UC-DAVIS, UCLA, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Seven departments - Biology, Chemistry, Economics, English, Geology, History, and Mathematics - represented 41% of the total sample (Table 2). It should be noted that the mathematics department was not included in the sample of one of the larger participating institutions and, as a result, the 6% figure in this table is not a true representation of the proportion of all teaching assistants assigned to this department.

TABLE 2

RESPONDENTS BY MAJOR DEPARTMENTS

AMONG ALL 1357 RESPONDENTS

Department	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total
Biology	76	(6)
Chemistry	103	(8)
Economics	55	(4)
English	115	(8)
Geology	55	(4)
History	67	(5)
Mathematics	80	(6)
TOTAL	551	(41)

Sixty-eight percent of all respondents were teaching within those disciplines generally classified as the Arts & Sciences (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

RESPONDENTS BY MAJOR ACADEMIC AREAS

Science & Mathematics	427
Social Science	288
Humanities	206
Engineering	115
Performing Arts	71
Agriculture	49
Management	42
Education	41
Home Economics	31
Communications	28
Computer Science	17

A department-by-department response will be found on pages 8 to 13.

TOTAL RESPONSES BY ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT

	N	%
Department		
Agriculture	4	0
Ag. Econ	9	1
Ecology	5	0
Environ Studies	6	0
Food Sci	2	0
Veg. Crops	3	0
Environ Toxi	2	0
Agronomy	1	0
Plant Pathology	2	0
Wildlife	4	0
Etomology	1	0
Agri Economic	1	0
Ani Physiol	8	1
Soil Science	1	0
Land,Air,Water	1	0
Architecture	4	0
Landscape Arch	2	0
Arch Technol	1	0
Environ Design	4	0
Visual Studies	1	0
Art	14	1
Fine Arts	4	0
Photography	2	0

(CONTINUED)

	N	%
Department		
Art Education	1	0
Art Media Stud	2	0
Textile Arts	1	0
Sculpture	1	0
Art History	2	0
Communications	4	0
Advertising	1	0
TCR/TRF	9	1
Journalism	4	0
Public Commun	1	0
Public Relations	1	0
Speech Commun	8	1
Computer Sci	16	1
Mgmt Info System	1	0
Not Indicated	12	1
Education	1	0
Edu Psychology	15	1
Health	3	0
Physical Edu	17	1
Teach & Curric	5	0
Science Teach	1	0
Business Edu	1	0
Engineering	4	0

(CONTINUED)

	N	%
Department		
Chemical Engin	11	1
Civil Engineer	19	1
Electric Engin	31	2
Industri Engin	15	1
Mechan Engin	30	2
Biomed Engin	1	0
Petroleum Engin	3	0
Construct Engin	1	0
Operation Engin	1	0
Forestry	1	0
Humanities	1	0
English	115	8
Romance Lang	21	2
Philosophy	17	1
Spanish	27	2
Linguistics	3	0
Rhetoric	6	0
Mod Thought Lit	1	0
Asian Language	2	0
Slavic Language	6	0
German Studies	5	0
Modern Language	5	0
Law	4	0

(CONTINUED)

	N	%
Department		
Legal Write Advo	2	0
Management	13	1
Accounting	12	1
Finance	2	0
Marketing	15	1
Performing Arts	11	1
Dance	10	1
Dramatic Art	8	1
Music	10	1
Music Education	1	0
Music Perfors	2	0
Vocal Perfors	2	0
Nursing	1	0
Social Sciences	1	0
Afro-Am Studies	1	0
Anthropology	18	1
Economics	55	4
Geography	23	2
History	67	5
Political Sci	30	2
Psychology	50	4
Sociology	28	2
Family Counsel	7	1

(CONTINUED)

	N	%
Department		
Non-Violent Study	1	0
Religion	5	0
Public Affairs	2	0
Social Psychol	1	0
Botany	10	1
Geology	55	4
Mathematics	80	6
Microbiology	6	0
Physics	36	3
Statistics	13	1
Chemistry	103	8
Biology	76	6
Zoology	15	1
Bacteriology	9	1
Physiology	3	0
Avian Sciences	1	0
Biochemistry	8	1
Genetics	3	0
Geophysics	3	0
Applied Earth Sci	4	0
Construction Sci	4	0
Human Develop	5	0
Food Sci & Tech	16	1

(CONTINUED)

	N	%
Department		
Textile & Cloth	9	1
Interior Design	1	0
OVERALL	1357	100

Fifty-nine percent (777) of the respondents were men; 17% (222) were international students, with 45% (92) of these coming from Asian countries (Table 4).

TABLE 4

RESPONDENTS BY GENDER, CITIZENSHIP, AND COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Gender	All n	(%)
Male	777	(59)
Female	550	(41)

Citizenship	All n	(%)
U.S.	1122	(83)
Other	232	(17)

Origin (not U. S.)	All n	(%)
Asia	92	(45)
Europe	44	(21)
Mid-East	15	(7)
North America	20	(10)
Latin America	22	(11)
Africa	5	(2)
Other	7	(4)

An analysis of the gender of the respondents by academic discipline will be found in Table 5.

TABLE 5

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS BY ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

	SEX			
	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Discipline				
Agriculture	27	56	21	44
Architecture	8	73	3	27
Art	14	54	12	46
Communication	11	41	16	59
Computer Science	11	65	6	35
Education	18	43	24	57
Engineering	101	87	15	13
Environ Science	1	100	.	.
Home Economics	4	13	27	87
Humanities	99	48	108	52
Law	1	17	5	83
Management	20	50	20	50
Perform Arts	17	41	24	59
Social Science	159	56	124	44
Science & Math	279	66	141	34
Other	7	64	4	36
OVERALL	777	59	550	41

While 47% (630) reported that they were doctoral candidates, a large number 582 (43%) were enrolled in a master's degree level program with 127 (10%) stating that they were candidates for other degrees or certificates (Table 6).

TABLE 6

RESPONDENTS BY DEGREE SOUGHT

Degrees	All n	(%)
BS/BA	582	(43)
MA/MS	630	(47)
Other	127	(10)

The teaching assistants were almost equally divided into the three basic types of assignment, with 31% (408) reporting that they were fully responsible for their classes, 35% (468) reporting that they were working with a single faculty member, and 34% (453) stating that they were part of a team of faculty and other graduate teaching assistants (Table 7).

TABLE 7

RESPONDENTS BY TEACHING SITUATION

Teaching Situation	All n	(%)
fully responsible	408	(31)
work with 1 faculty	468	(35)
work with a team	453	(34)

When asked about their prior teaching experience, 44% (582) reported that they had taught previously, with 31% (417) stating that their teaching experience had been at the college or university level. Nineteen percent (390) of all teaching assistants in our sample reported some formal preparation in teaching prior to their present assignments (Table 8).

TABLE 8

PRIOR TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Other Teaching Positions	All n	(%)
Have had a position. taught in:	582	(44)
K-12	174	(13)
college	417	(31)
pub./priv. agency	91	(7)
other	69	(5)
had formal preparation	390	(29)

Seventy-five percent (978) stated that they plan to teach in a college or university when they complete their graduate program. With the exception of Architecture (40%), Communications (48%), and Law (17%), over 50% of the respondents of every discipline planned to teach after receiving their degrees Table 9).

TABLE 9

PLANNING TO TEACH BY DISCIPLINE

	Plan to Teach			
	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Discipline				
Agriculture	29	62	18	38
Architecture	4	40	6	60
Art	22	85	4	15
Communication	13	48	14	52
Computer Science	10	56	8	44
Education	33	79	9	21
Engineering	66	58	47	42
Environ Science	1	50	1	50
Home Economics	20	65	11	35
Humanities	184	89	22	11
Law	1	17	5	83
Management	34	85	6	15
Perform Arts	33	75	11	25
Nursing	.	.	1	100
Social Science	249	87	37	13
Science & Math	269	67	134	33
Other	10	100	.	.
OVERALL	978	75	334	25

Three hundred and twenty-nine (35%) were in their initial year as teaching assistants (Table 10).

TABLE 10

YEARS AS A TEACHING ASSISTANT

Years Been a TA	All n	All (%)
First Year	329	(35)
Two or More Years	619	(65)

III. Background For Their Assignments

> Just because I can draw, doesn't mean I can teach. (Architecture)
>
> I have been assigned to a course that is not only outside of my specialization but also outside of my remotest interests. (Chemistry)
>
> Almost no one aspires to teach language - we wish to teach literature or linguistics. Basic language instruction is a way to earn a living. We do not get the opportunity to teach in our specializations. (Spanish & Portuguese)
>
> I have seen inexperienced graduate students given a course to teach with only five days warning ... in addition, no effort was made to check the student's background for teaching this course. (Geography)
>
> My biggest complaint is that sometimes T.A.'s are put into an area completely out of their expertise in an effort to make them learn that particular field more intensely - which is not beneficial to the undergrads and is really not fair to anyone. (Geology)

Participants were asked two questions relating to the adequacy of their academic backgrounds as they relate to their assignments:

1. Do you believe your academic background is adequate for your responsibility?
2. Are you teaching in an area you consider to be your discipline or specialization?

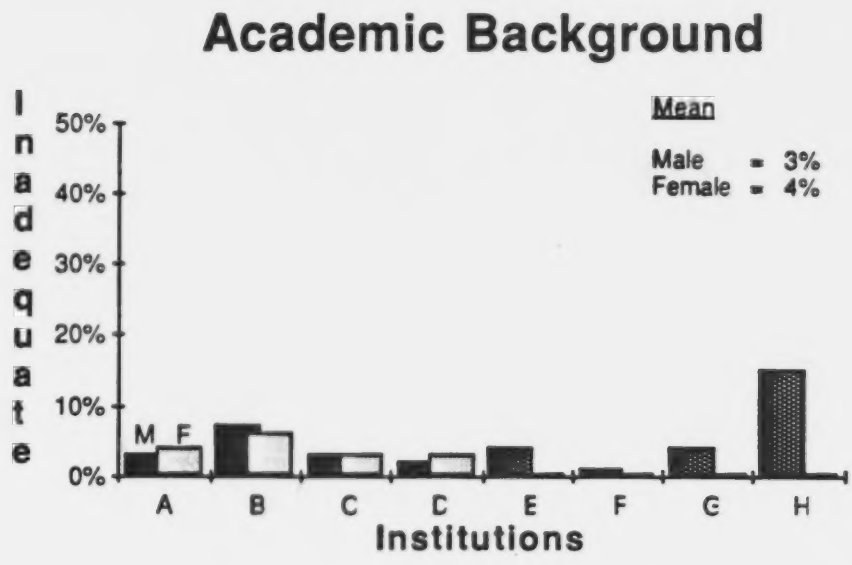
These two questions were analyzed in four ways:

- By sex (by institution)
- By citizenship (by institution)
- By discipline
- By department

With the exception of one institution, there did not appear to be a major difference between the responses of men and women regarding the adequacy of their academic backgrounds for their teaching assignments. (Table 11). (In reviewing this data, please keep in mind that the small number of respondents from institutions G & H may not be truly representative). However, 4% of all women and 3% of all men felt that their backgrounds were inadequate. In other words, approximately one in every 25 teaching assistants was teaching in a course for which they did not feel adequately prepared.

TABLE 11

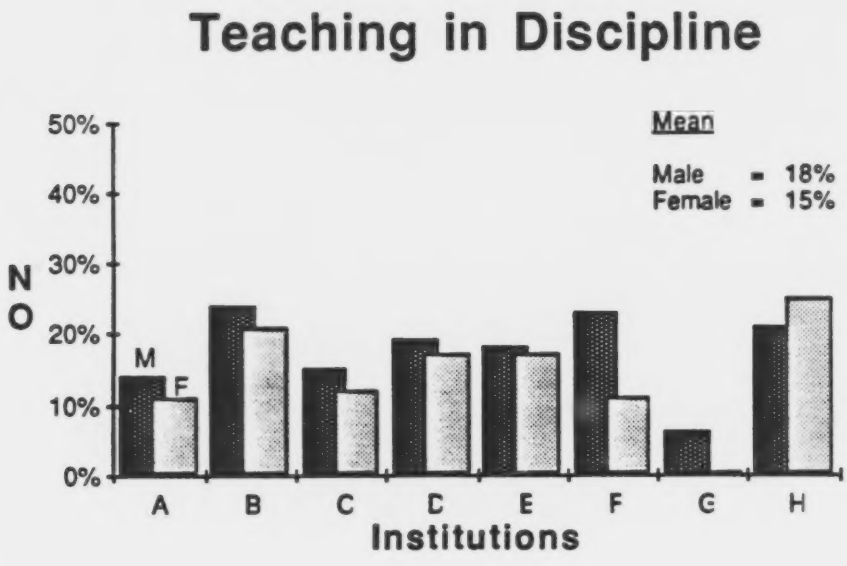
ADEQUACY OF ACADEMIC BACKGROUND BY GENDER



In a number of institutions, 20% or more of the teaching assistants reported that they were teaching outside of their disciplines (Table 12)---a less significant problem but a problem nevertheless since it implies that their assignment has little to do with their long-range academic goals. While the problem was slightly higher for men than women, the difference was not significant. It is anticipated that in some instances these assignments were appropriate where, for example, an engineering major would be teaching a mathematics course or an international TA would be teaching a language course in his or her native language.

TABLE 12

TEACHING IN DISCIPLINE BY GENDER



There appeared to be no significant difference between national and international TAs in regard to whether or not they had the appropriate academic background for their assignments (Table 13), but this was not the case in regard to teaching in their disciplines (Table 14) where a substantially larger number of international TAs (23%) than for U.S. citizens (16%) reported teaching outside of their disciplines. In several institutions, this problem was particularly acute. Assigning international graduate teaching assistants to teach outside of their disciplines may create even more problems for a population who already face the challenges of living and working in a different culture and of teaching in a second language.

TABLE 13

ADEQUACY OF ACADEMIC BACKGROUND BY CITIZENSHIP

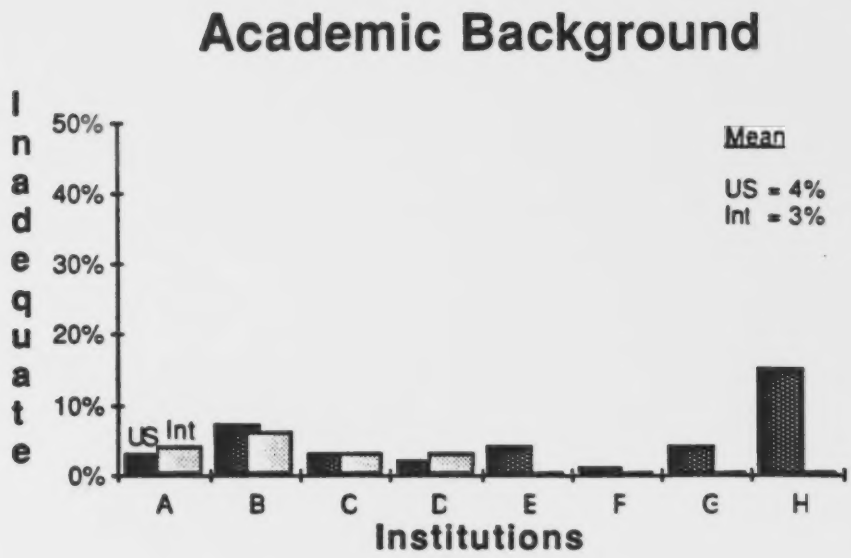
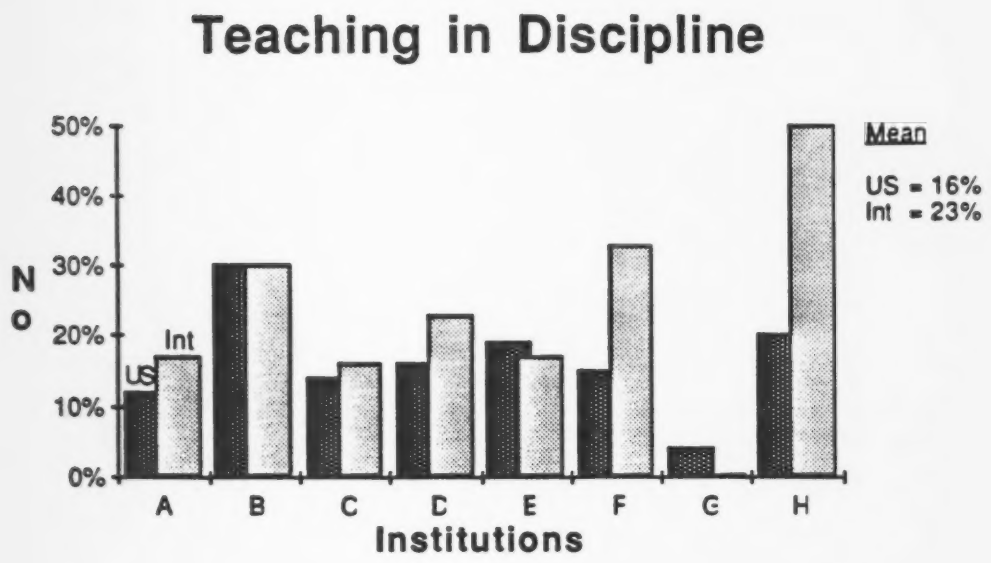


TABLE 14

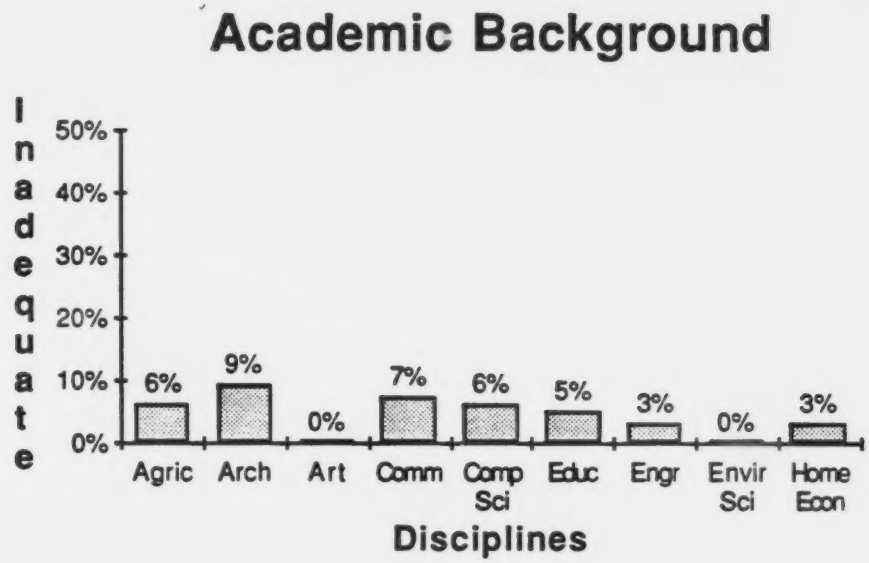
TEACHING IN DISCIPLINE BY CITIZENSHIP



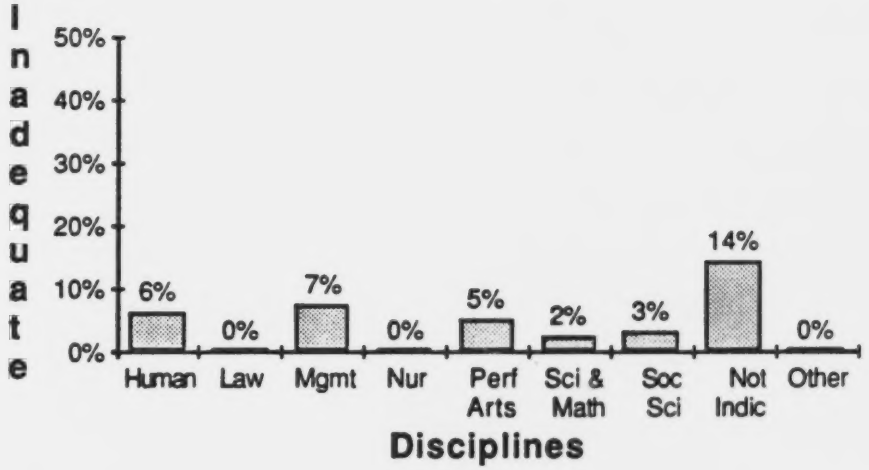
Teaching Assistants in Architecture (9%), Communications (7%), Management (7%), Agriculture (6%), Computer Science (6%), and the Humanities (6%) report the greatest problems with their assignments in regards to their academic backgrounds (Table 15). Thirty-three percent (33%) of all TAs in Computer Science, 20% in Architecture, and 19% in Engineering reported that they were teaching outside of their disciplines (Table 16). High percentages were also reported in Education, The Humanities, Law, the Performing Arts, and Science and Mathematics.

TABLE 15

ADEQUACY OF ACADEMIC BACKGROUND BY DISCIPLINE



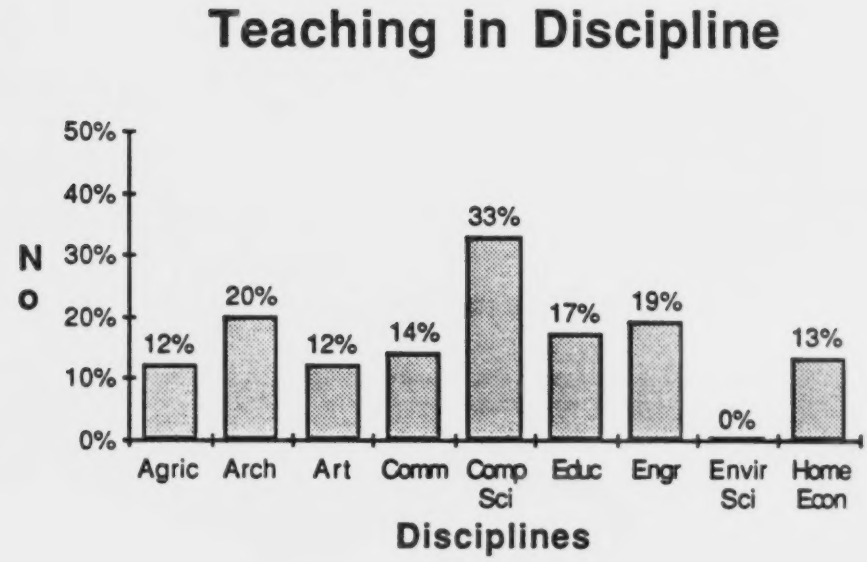
Note: n = Agric (49), Arch (11), Art (27), Comm (28), Comp Sci (17), Educ (41), Engr (115), Envir Sci (2), Home Econ (31).



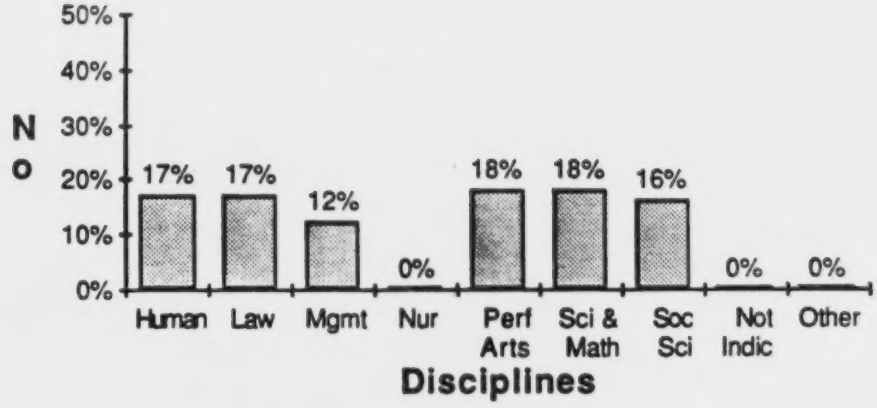
Note: n = Human (206), Law (6), Mgmt (42), Nur (1), Perf Arts (44), Sci & Math (427), Soc Sci (288), Not Indic (14), Other (4).

TABLE 16

TEACHING IN DISCIPLINE BY DISCIPLINE



Note: n = Agric (49), Arch (10), Art (26), Comm (28), Comp Sci (18), Educ (41), Engr (116), Envir Sci (2), Home Econ (31).



Note: n = Human (207), Law (6), Mgmt (42), Nur (1), Perf Arts (44), Sci & Math (424), Soc Sci (285), Not Indic (7), Other (4).

At the department level, the greatest problem regarding academic background was in English where, as noted previously, individuals with literature backgrounds and interests are often asked to teach composition (Table 17). In all but one of the major reporting departments (Economics), 18% to 21% of all teaching assistants reported that they were not teaching in their discipline. Economics was substantially lower at 9% (Table 18).

TABLE 17

ADEQUACY OF ACADEMIC BACKGROUND BY MAJOR DEPARTMENTS

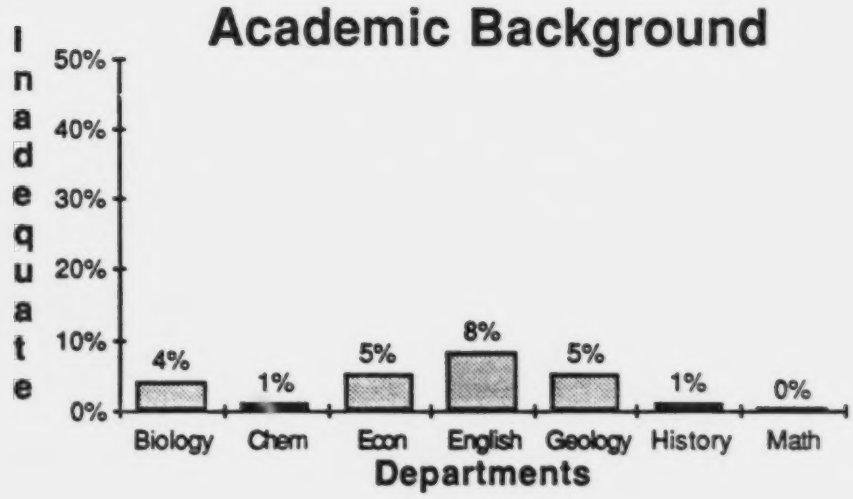
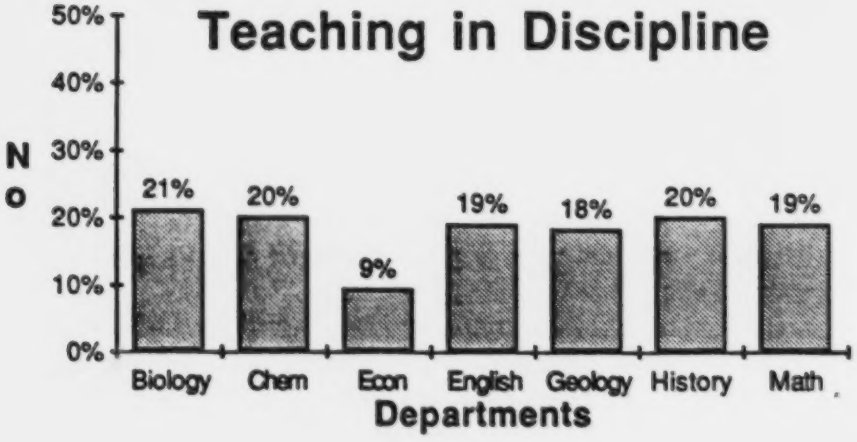


TABLE 18

TEACHING IN DISCIPLINE BY MAJOR DEPARTMENTS



IV. Adequacy Of Time

The number of minimum essays we must assign and grade is so great (10 essays in 13 weeks of instruction) that we are driven far too often to the very verge of despair; and we regularly have to take away time from our studies to grade essays - a problem the department absolutely refuses to understand. (English)

Being an effective TA is rather difficult when one is involved in full-time scientific research. Demands of one's own work and one's advisor combine to undermine otherwise good intentions toward students. (Chemistry)

Lack of time to prepare lectures, tests and discussions is the biggest constraint to being effective as a teacher. My own work takes first priority, and indeed, it must. (Economics)

It would be nice to have either <u>less</u> teaching responsibilities, or <u>more</u> time to do our job better than <u>adequately</u>. It's so hard to be fifty percent teacher and fifty percent student. One feels one can't do well in either equally, so one of the two is usually neglected. (French)

Our teaching jobs are only supposed to require twenty hours per week. This is the <u>minimum</u> time necessary for preparation, teaching, office hours, etc. I find myself spending up to thirty hours a week (to the detriment of my own graduate studies) just to fulfill the basic requirements of the course. (I teach two classes, two hours each per week with fifty students.) Although I'm grateful for the opportunity, experience and money, at this rate I'll be forever getting through the doctoral program - <u>not</u> a bright prospect. (History)

It is difficult to do well in both our own studies and also teach effectively. Preparation in one area brings lack of preparation in the other and thus I personally always feel that I am "failing" at something. (Mathematics)

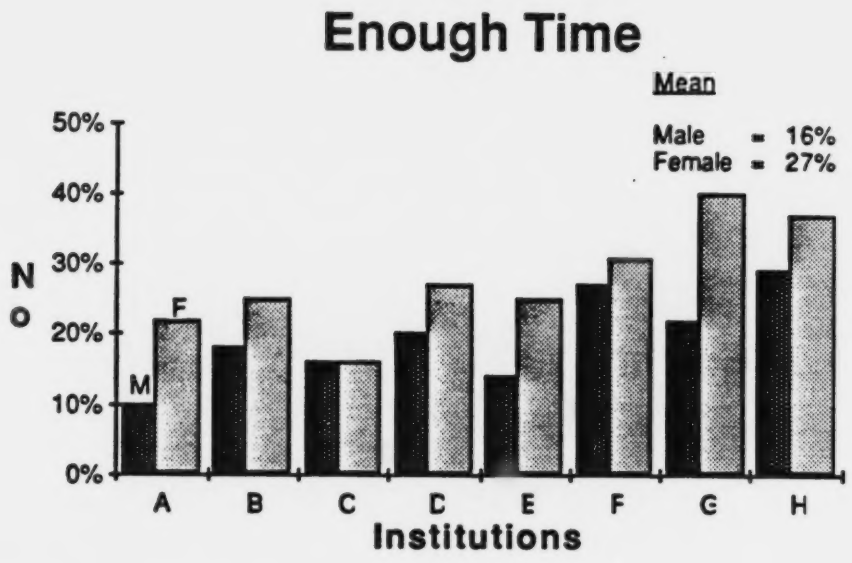
I spend much more time than the advertised twenty hours a week, often leaving me too tired for my own work. This leaves me bitter and resentful and I admit I am sometimes terse with students. Next year I am making a personal policy to hold office hours at regularly scheduled times such that if a student wishes to see me he/she can do so then. Beyond that my time will be for my work. (Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering)

Participants were asked, "Do you feel that you are given enough time to adequately fulfill your teaching responsibility?" The data were analyzed further by gender, citizenship, discipline, and by major departments.

In every institution but one, women reported a far greater problem in this area than men (27% vs 16%) (Table 19). The reasons for this significant gender difference require further study. Approximately 20% of all respondents felt that the time allotted for their teaching assignments was inadequate.

TABLE 19

ENOUGH TIME BY GENDER



As will be noted in Table 20, over 30% of men and women teaching assistants in English departments reported a time priority with the difference between the two groups relatively minor (4%).

TABLE 20

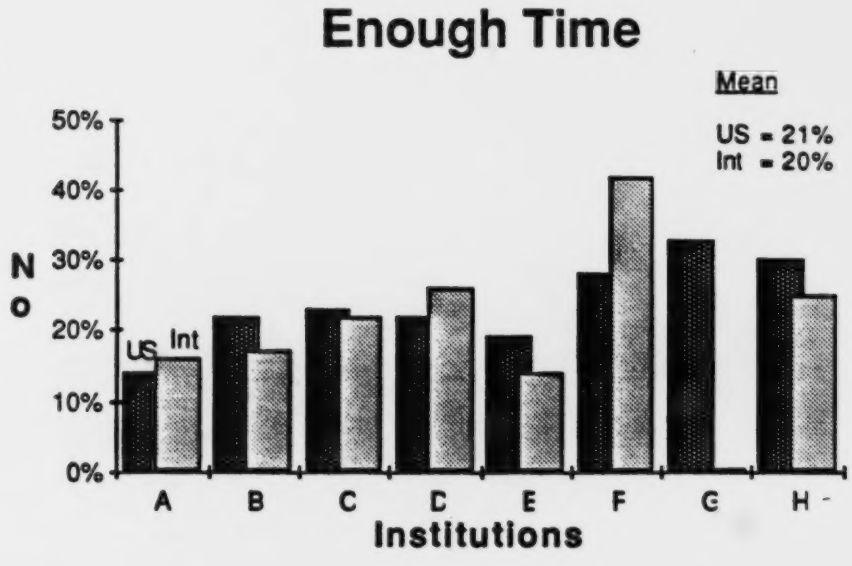
ENOUGH TIME BY GENDER, DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH

	GIVEN ENOUGH TIME			
	Yes		No	
Gender	n	(%)	n	(%)
Male	36	(68)	17	(32)
Female	37	(64)	21	(36)
Overall	73	(66)	38	(34)

There was no significant difference regarding time problems reported by U.S. and international TAs (Table 21).

TABLE 21

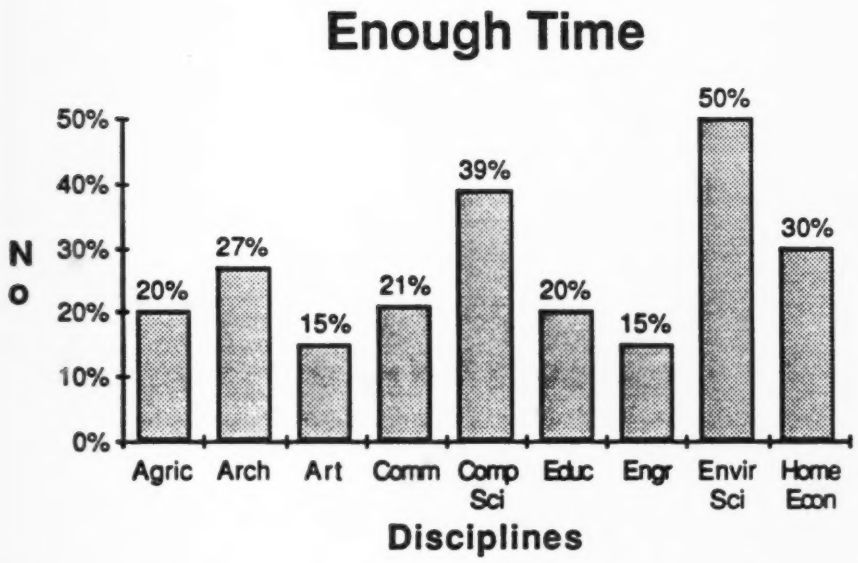
ENOUGH TIME BY CITIZENSHIP



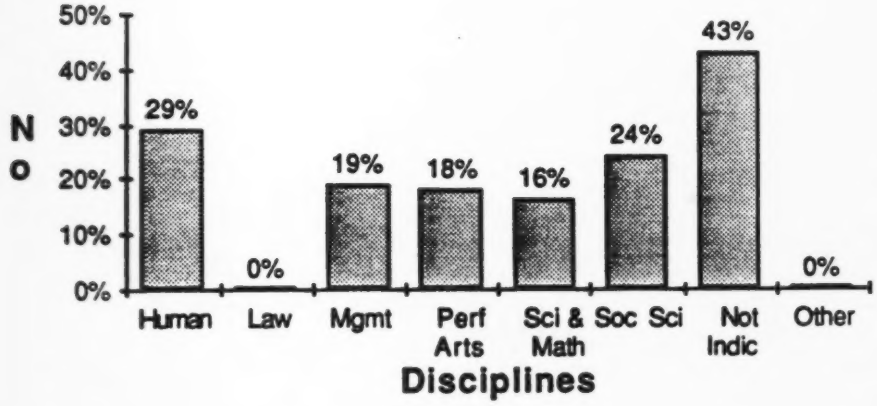
There were, however, significant differences among the various disciplines. Major time problems were reported in Environmental Science (50%), Computer Science (39%), Home Economics (30%), the Humanities (29%), and Architecture (27%) (Table 22).

TABLE 22

ENOUGH TIME BY DISCIPLINE



Note: n = Agric (50), Arch (11), Art (27), Comm (28), Comp Sci (18), Educ (41), Engr (114), Envir Sci (2), Home Econ (30).

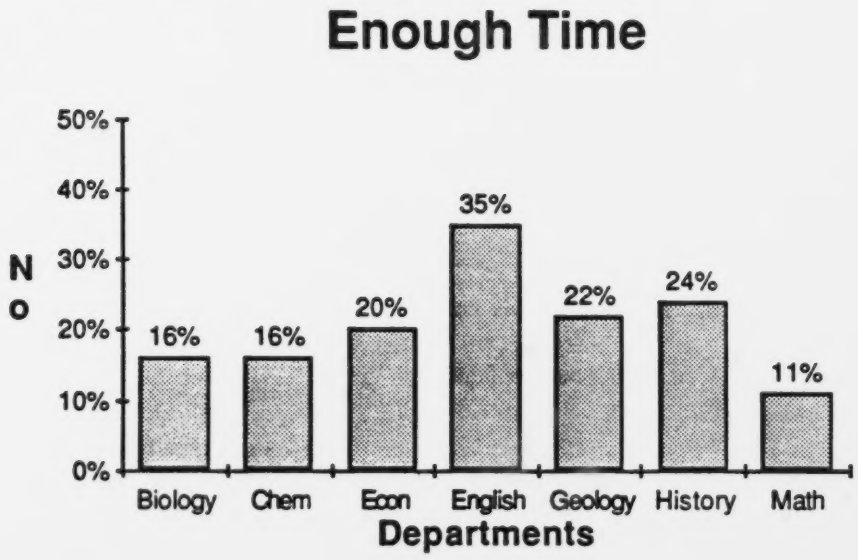


Note: n = Human (205), Law (6), Mgmt (42), Perf Arts (44), Sci & Math (421), Soc Sci (289), Not Indic (7), Other (4).

As noted previously, time was a significant problem for teaching assistants in English (35%), with nearly one out of four reporting a problem in History (24%) and Geology (22%). In only one of the major departments (Mathematics) was this figure below 15% (Table 23).

TABLE 23

ENOUGH TIME BY MAJOR DEPARTMENTS



The problem of adequate time to fulfill both their teaching and academic responsibilities is apparent for all teaching assistants, with the problem being particularly acute for first year assistants where 25% reported a problem (Table 24).

TABLE 24

ENOUGH TIME BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

	GIVEN ENOUGH TIME			
	Yes		No	
Years Been a TA	n	(%)	n	(%)
First Year	244	(75)	82	(25)
Two or More Years	485	(80)	122	(20)
Overall	729	(78)	204	(22)

V. Guidance And Supervision

The faculty member that I work with gives me no supervision. I feel that his lack of interference is a blessing. (Art)

I think we need more supervision - no one visits my classroom. All response to my ability as a teacher rests on student evaluation of my performance - a dangerous thing since we have no feedback from other teachers. (English)

It's not that faculty attention to T.A. teaching skills is inadequate - it's just non-existent. (Anthropology)

I think that this program offers a wonderful opportunity to the professor, teaching-assistant, and student(s). It gives the professor the opportunity to pass on his knowledge and teaching skills to an individual just beginning. In the process of teaching, the TA will learn a great deal from this experience. (Afro-American Studies)

As far as I am concerned, the best thing a department can do for me as a T.A. is to make clear my responsibilities, and then just let me do my job. (Chemistry)

The Mathematics Department is not supportive of its T.A.'s. I do a good job in spite of the department, but they really don't care. There are no rewards for a job well done, and no punishments for poor work. (Mathematics)

I've solved my problems by myself and with the help of other T.A.'s and graduate students, so who needs the faculty now? They just tend to get in the way where they're so out of touch with students abilities, needs, and problems. (History)

There is absolutely no supervision. (Geology)

The best T.A. Supervisor I've had was another T.A. who was teaching a lower level course. She held weekly meetings where T.A.'s were responsible to be prepared (for week's assignment), and she also made sure we understood the assignment by the end of the meeting even if we didn't at first. Most professors don't take that effort with T.A.'s. (Mechanical Engineering)

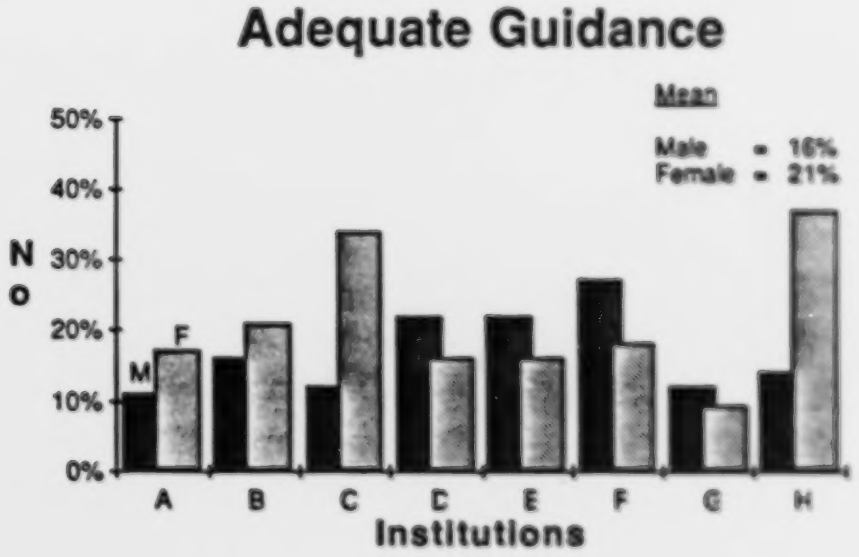
I have received excellent training thanks to an excellent supervisor... I am being well treated, enjoying my work tremendously and feeling that I am having a wonderful experience. (French)

Participants were asked, "Generally, do you feel you have received adequate guidance and supervision from the department or college in which you teach?" The guidance provided to teaching assistants not only varies in quality and quantity, but also in the same department from supervisor to supervisor. It should also be noted that while the vast majority of the respondents desired quality supervision, there were some who preferred none at all.

Although women tended to rate guidance as less adequate than men (21% to 16% inadequate), this difference was particularly pronounced on two campuses, C & H, where the difference was in excess of 25% (Table 25). Since (a) the profiles of departments of all the participants were generally consistent and (b) on four of the campuses the men reported less adequate guidance than women, there appears to be some treatment or attitudinal difference toward men and women teaching assistants on these two campuses, which requires further study and follow-up.

TABLE 25

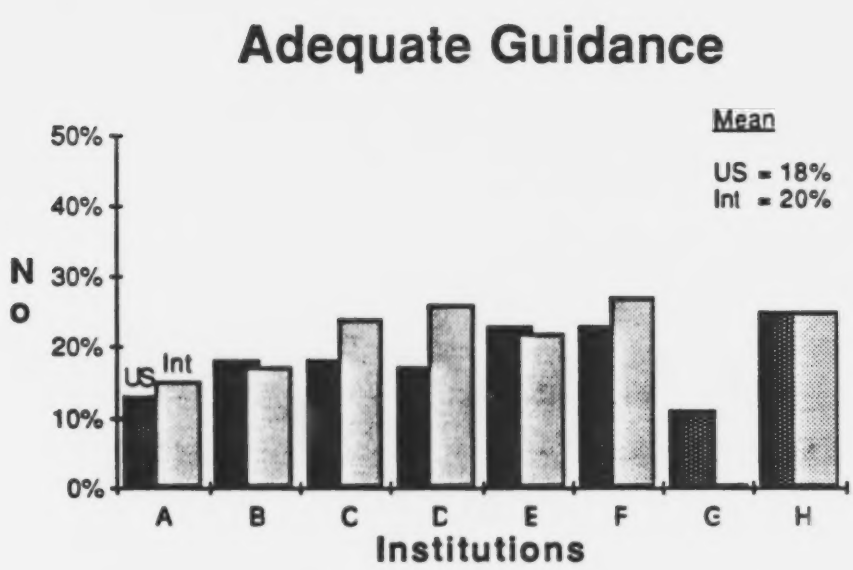
ADEQUATE GUIDANCE BY GENDER



There was no significant difference between the adequacy of guidance reported by American citizens and international TAs (Table 26).

TABLE 26

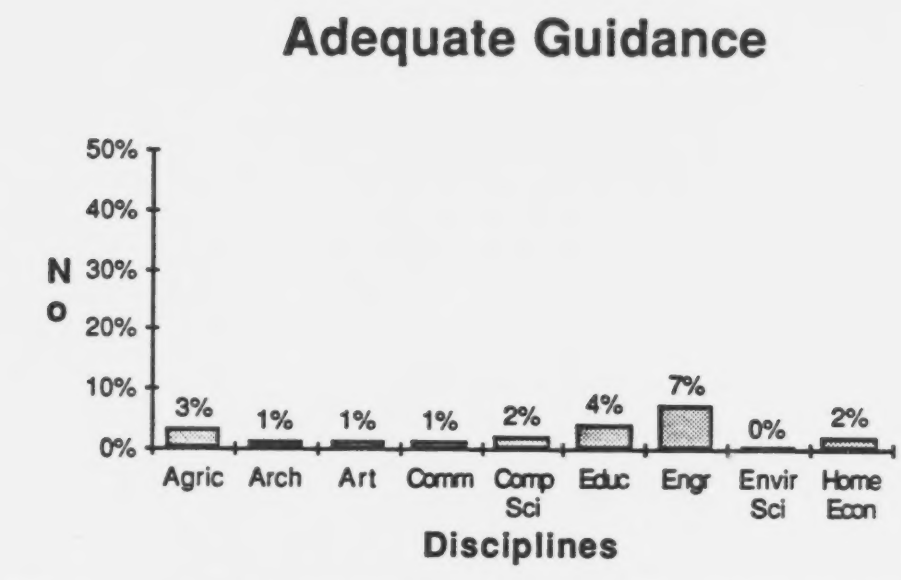
ADEQUATE GUIDANCE BY CITIZENSHIP



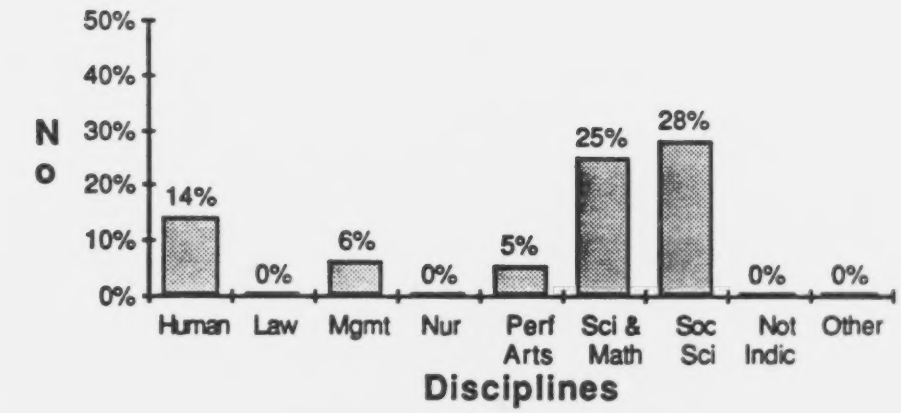
Faculty guidance and supervision were reported weakest in the traditional arts and sciences areas (inadequate guidance being reported by 28% of the TAs in the social sciences, 25% of those in science and mathematics, and by 14% of those in the humanities (Table 27). The professional schools received few complaints in these areas.

TABLE 27

ADEQUATE GUIDANCE BY DISCIPLINE



Note: n = Agric (50), Arch (11), Art (26), Comm (27), Comp Sci (18), Educ (42), Engr (115), Envir Sci (2), Home Econ (30).

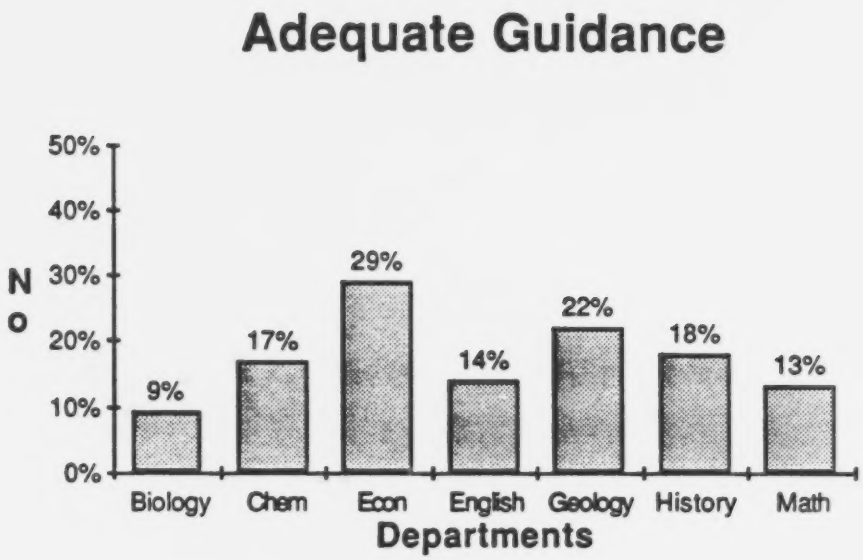


Note: n = Human (207), Law (6), Mgmt (42), Nur (1), Perf Arts (44), Sci & Math (419), Soc Sci (288), Not Indic (6), Other (3).

At the departmental level, inadequate guidance was reported by 29% of those teaching assistants in economics, with geology at 22% (Table 28). In short, one out of four teaching assistants in what is generally called the Arts & Sciences reported inadequate guidance.

TABLE 28

ADEQUATE GUIDANCE BY MAJOR DEPARTMENTS



While the number of first year teaching assistants reporting inadequate guidance was high (18%), the figure was slightly higher for experienced TAs where 20% stated that faculty supervision and guidance was inadequate (Table 29).

TABLE 29

ADEQUATE GUIDANCE BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

	ADEQUATE GUIDANCE			
	Yes		No	
Years Been a TA	n	(%)	n	(%)
First Year	263	(82)	59	(18)
Two or More Years	489	(80)	121	(20)
Overall	752	(81)	180	(19)

The five major areas of responsibility were analyzed further to see if responsibility and adequacy of supervision differed between first year and more experienced teaching assistants. No significant differences were found (Table 30).

TABLE 30

RESPONSIBILITY AND ADEQUACY OF SUPERVISION BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

		Responsible				Supervision				
		Yes		No		Adequate		Inadequate		N
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
QUESTION	Years Been a TA									
a. Lecturing	First Year	177	100	.	.	134	76	43	24	177
	=> 2 Years	356	100	.	.	268	75	88	25	356
b. Teaching Seminar Section	First Year	95	44	123	56	166	76	52	24	218
	=> 2 Years	208	49	213	51	325	77	96	23	421
c. Leading Class Discussion	First Year	222	83	47	17	210	78	59	22	269
	=> 2 Years	425	83	84	17	397	78	112	22	509
j. Supervising Labs	First Year	150	50	150	50	250	83	50	17	300
	=> 2 Years	279	51	264	49	440	81	103	19	543
k. Studio Supervision	First Year	53	18	248	82	251	83	50	17	301
	=> 2 Years	99	18	449	82	445	81	103	19	548

VI. Areas of Responsibility

> The level of responsibility the TA has in each course seems to directly depend upon the instructor. I have taught for some instructors who insist on having input on every level - and others say "It's all yours - do what you want." (Geology)
>
> Some quarters, my load has been heavy (sixty students - midterms, term papers, finals to grade, plus three discussion sections to teach, office hours, etc.). (Anthropology)

As part of this study, an effort was made to provide a clearer picture of the responsibilities of the teaching assistants and to ascertain if they felt the supervision they received for each of the responsibilities they had (see Table 31, Parts I, II, and III) was adequate.

The most common responsibilities were:

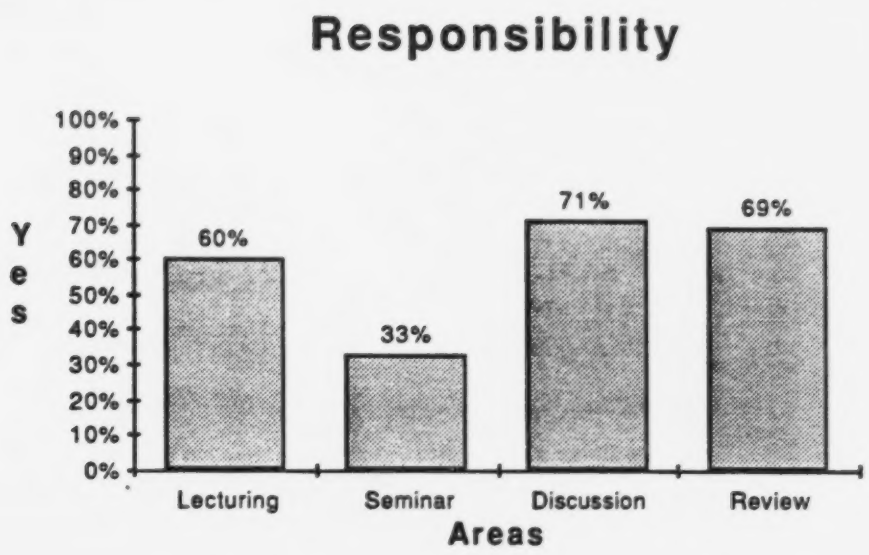
Grading	97%
Office Hours	94%
Preparing Tests	72%
Leading Class Discussions	71%
Conducting Review Sessions	69%
Lecturing	60%
Advising/Counseling	59%
Supervising Laboratories	49%

Of the 71% of the Teaching Assistants responsible for leading discussions, 32% reported inadequate supervision for this activity. Inadequate supervision was also reported by approximately 25% of those responsible for lecturing, leading seminars, and conducting review sessions. Supervision for the other major areas of responsibility was significantly better. Apparently, the more instructionally significant the activity is, the poorer the faculty supervision was perceived to be.

TABLE 31

RESPONSIBILITY AND ADEQUACY OF SUPERVISION BY ASSIGNMENT

PART I



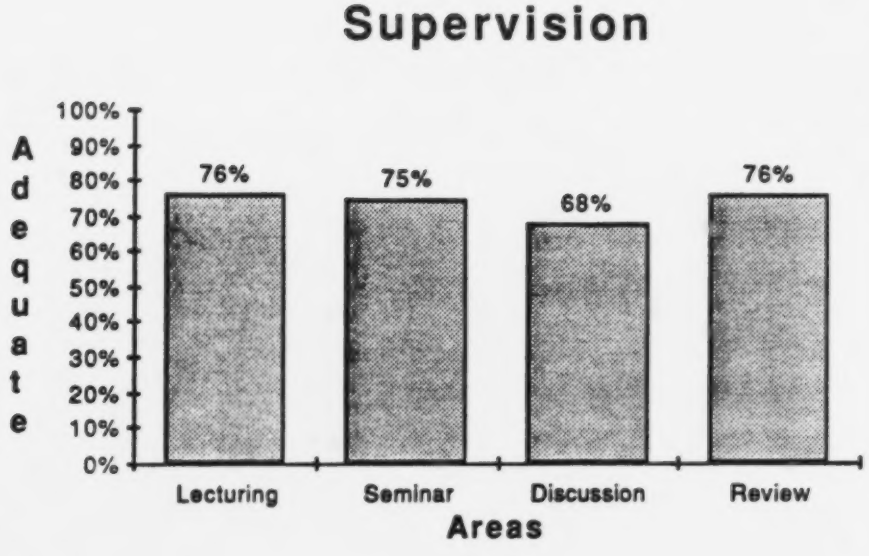
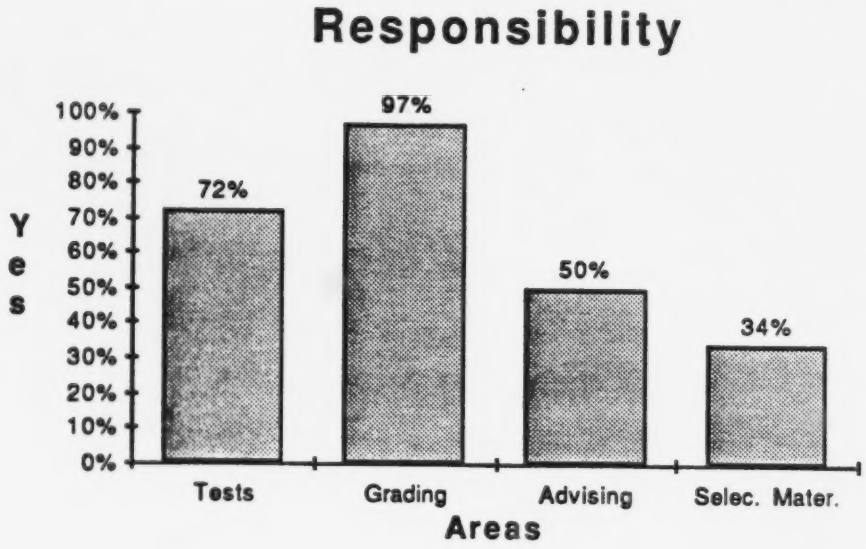


TABLE 31

RESPONSIBILITY AND ADEQUACY OF SUPERVISION BY ASSIGNMENT

PART II



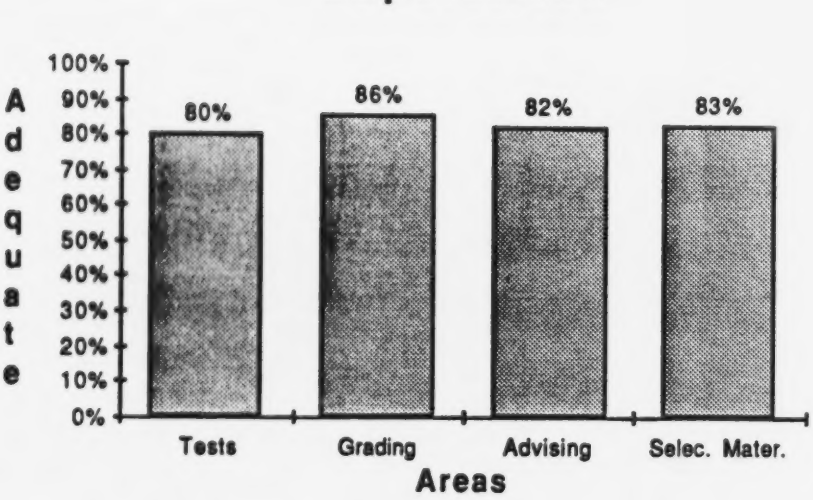
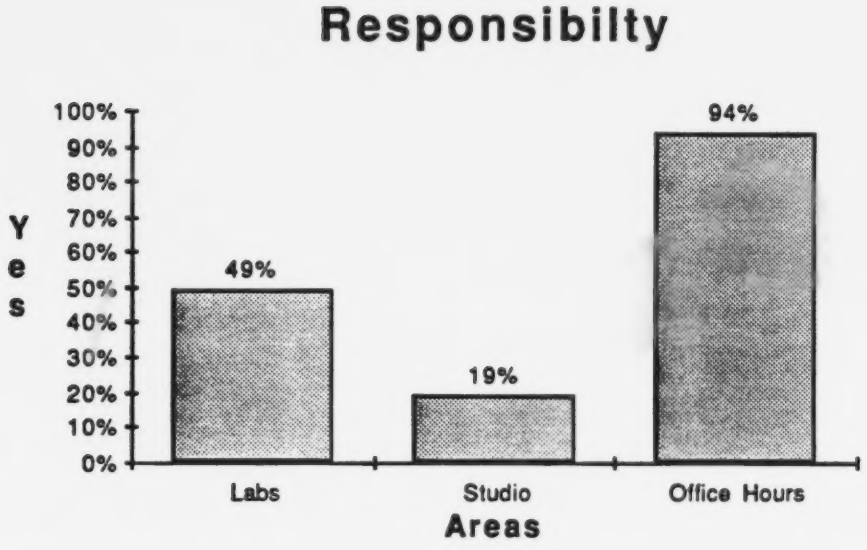
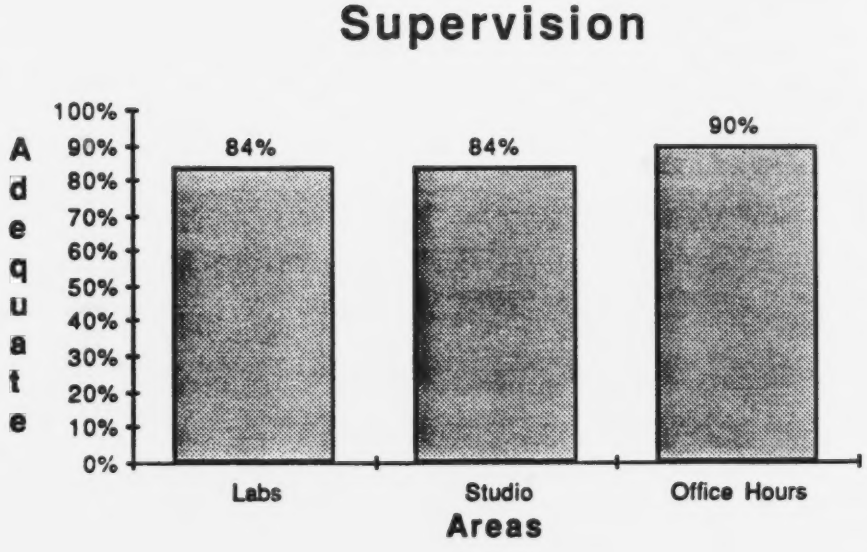


TABLE 31

RESPONSIBILITY AND ADEQUACY OF SUPERVISION BY ASSIGNMENT

PART III





The support programs offered by the participating institutions were extremely varied and represented fairly well the full range of what is being offered nationally at this time. Seven of the participating institutions described their support programs as follows:

- A formal orientation, offered by a central university office, is required of all new teaching assistants, with a number of teaching-related sessions being offered during the academic year. Departments offer a number of support activities, which range from a year-long seminar involving microteaching to in-class videotaping, student surveys, and presentations on teaching methods. A mandatory language testing program by foreign TAs is being implemented on a trial basis. Special optional sessions for this group are also available.
- Departmental programs vary from informal to a required week of preparation prior to start of the fall semester. Optional university-wide seminars, programs for international TAs, and individual tutoring by faculty from the School of Education are also available. A Teaching Assistants' Handbook is distributed annually to all Teaching Assistants.
- Optional services and materials provided by a central agency include: A TA orientation, a handbook for TAs, videotaping and consultation, printed materials, evaluation forms, and a course for foreign teaching assistants. Some departments offer their own programs.
- An annual TA conference is required by some departments, with many departments offering their own programs. Microteaching is heavily used, with many departments using a workshop in speaking offered by the central academic support unit. This unit also funds a course for foreign TAs,

and a formal course in English as a second language is available through the English department. Many departments also use peer observation, and several offer "demonstration classes" taught by experienced TAs.

- An optional, all-campus program (2-4 days) is offered prior to the fall semester by a central agency. Formal, required workshops on teaching are sponsored by two colleges, with many departments offering their own workshops. A two- or three-day seminar on college teaching is available and is, for the most part, optional, with international TAs required to take a standardized language fluency test and a course in English if a language problem is identified.
- A four-day seminar for TAs is offered prior to the start of the fall semester (while optional, it is required by some departments). Segments of the seminar are devoted to international TAs, with course evaluation services and consultation services available on an optional basis during the academic year. Special language testing for international TAs is mandatory, with a prestated performance level being required before an international teaching assistant is permitted to have instructional responsibilities.
- Workshops for TAs in instructional development, teaching materials and resources, evaluation of teaching performance and microteaching are offered regularly on an optional basis.

The responses to these programs by the teaching assistants were as varied as the programs themselves.

> I would greatly appreciate it if the University would sponsor a class for TAs. We now have a terrific orientation session and a class on University teaching. This class needs to be

required or at least highly recommended by each department. (Art)

The teaching resources center has been an incredible help to me. Without them, I would have had actually no guidance in teaching techniques and surely I could not have won the outstanding TA award that I did. My department, to my chagrin, has continually downplayed and ranted against the center as invasionary. I suggest (implore?) the teaching resources center to aggressively "invade" - the tools they have to offer are too important to have imperious professors deny them to their TAs and undergraduate students. (Philosophy)

There are many programs available here to aid TAs in their teaching, but few graduate students in my department participate (including myself). I suppose what should be done is that individual departments should strongly encourage or require TAs to attend some - especially those interested in continuing in academia. (Psychology)

Our resources center offers numerous services for students interested in learning about/improving teaching skills - these are voluntary. I feel that a paid one-day workshop for new TAs would be extremely beneficial. I have worked with many TAS who have not taken advantage of the teaching services and feel some instruction/introduction is necessary. (Sociology)

The Teaching Resources Centre here does an excellent job of supporting TAs. I always have one of them come in to evaluate one midquarter so that I get a good idea of what the students expect from me. Occasionally I use the video-taping service which is also very helpful. (Economics)

The yearly or week-long GTA seminar is a total waste of time!!! (Psychology)

I would like counseling on how to conduct oneself in the classroom and feedback relating to my performance. Also I would like to meet with someone weekly who could advise me on steps necessary to overcome shyness, etc. (I would very much like to feel at home in my classroom). (Mathematics)

I consider our preparation inadequate. The campus-wide "orientation sessions" for TAs that I have attended are often dull, rarely helpful. I think I would gain more from departmental orientation and small workshops that included small group techniques, writing analysis and technique advising, and "norming" sessions to teach grading standards. Perhaps requiring a video-taped or other formal evaluation would be good, too. As things stand, however, funds are being

cut at this University for existing programs. (Political Science)

The university does have a workshop for beginning GTAs; however, the student must be nominated to attend. I think all GTAs should have a chance, even if it means offering more workshops. Many valuable lessons were given, along with the opportunity to meet GTAs from all over the university (Home Economics)

A teaching methods manual for TAs might be useful in developing teaching ability. As it stands, teaching methods come about mostly from experience and trial and error. (Geology)

I had to seek out on my own a program offered by the College of Education for teaching assistants. This program offered discussion groups with other TAs as well as classroom evaluation. I learned more about teaching for one month in the program than 1-1/2 years working with my professors - yet my department continues to resist requiring all TAs to participate in this program. (History)

Most programs I've encountered for improving teaching ability are a waste of time, except perhaps for woefully incompetent TAs who probably don't care about improving their teaching skills anyway. There is no way I have found to learn to teach except by jumping right in and doing it. (Chemistry)

Our TA orientation programme does include instructions for foreign students, but the programme was offered at a time when my department was steeped in comprehensive exams. In any event, International students tend to be more aware of the items listed above than many American students: Evidence of American cultural imperialism! (Economics)

Before we came in as graduate students, we were given a "week" long orientation to the chemistry department. We also developed a sort of "support system." In addition, throughout the year, we have had weekly TA meetings to discuss what the next week would cover, what would be problem situations (either in lab or lecture) etc. I feel the faculty is really concerned for both the graduate and undergraduate population here. (Chemistry)

Despite the high quality of the seminars and workshops on teaching available here, few history TAs participate. Our schedules are all extremely tight, and no matter how interesting a workshop sounds, our more immediate responsibilities prevent us from taking advantage of more than one or two a year. It seems to me that the only solution to this problem is to shift the responsibility for training TAs

> away from the institution and to the individual departments. Only the history department itself can hold TAs accountable for attending workshops and seminars and improving their ability to teach history. (History)

Nearly three-quarters, 981, (74%) of all respondents replied that a support program was offered by their department, school, or university to support graduate teaching assistants in their instructional activities. Six hundred and fifty-eight (48%) reported that a program was offered by their institution; 200 (15%), by their school or college; 422 (31%), by their department. Six hundred and fifty eight (65%) stated that they participated to some degree in one or more of the programs (Table 32).

TABLE 32

AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Support Program	All	
	n	(%)
one was offered	981	(74)
by the institution	658	(48)
by a school	200	(15)
by a department	422	(31)
they participated	658	(65)

Of the 232 international students in our sample, 140 (67%) reported that they also attended special orientations for international students. Major areas included in training programs attended by these TAs were the roles of

the graduate teaching assistant, 140 (67%); information about the American university, 123 (59%); and instruction designed to improve their language skills, 109 (51%) (see Table 33).

TABLE 33

TRAINING PROVIDED, INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Training Provided	All n	(%)
orientation	140	(67)
information about American Universities	123	(59)
understanding cultural differences	103	(49)
role of the graduate assistant	140	(67)
improving language skills	109	(51)
role of the student and of the teacher	85	(40)

Respondents were asked to identify those areas in which they had received preparation and to identify those in which they would like additional training. Sixty-three percent (63%) reported having some preparation in

grading; 58% in developing their writing skills, and 54% in coordinating classroom discussion. Fifty percent or more of the teaching assistants wanted more or some preparation in a number of areas. (Table 34).

TABLE 34

AREAS IN WHICH MORE PREPARATION IS DESIRED

How to evaluate yourself as a teacher	72%
How to evaluate your course	71%
New developments in instructional technology	64%
Lecturing	60%
Coordinating classroom discussion	55%
Using media	54%
Developing writing skills	54%
Preparing tests	53%
Knowledge of available counseling services	52%
Time management	52%
Counseling/advising	50%

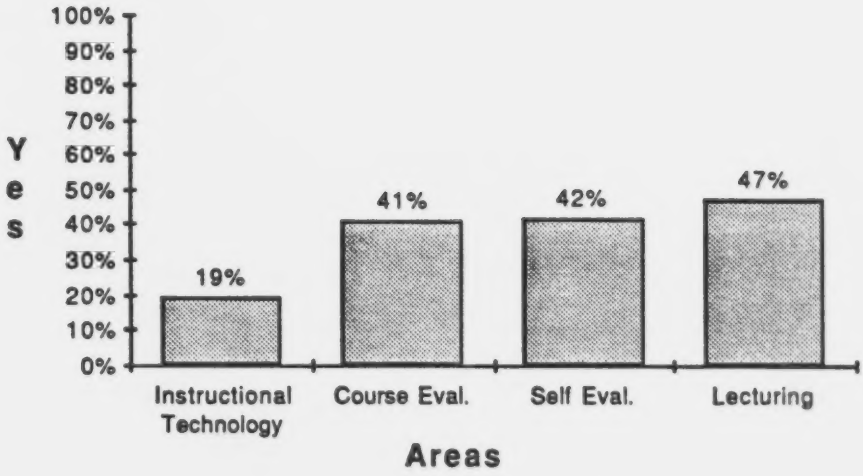
A more detailed analysis of the topics in which preparation was provided and in which more preparation is desired will be found on Table 35, Parts I, II, and III. The desire for more training and information did not appear to be directly related to how much training they already had in a given area.

TABLE 35

HAD PREPARATION / WANT PREPARATION BY AREA

PART I

Had Preparation



Want Some/More Preparation

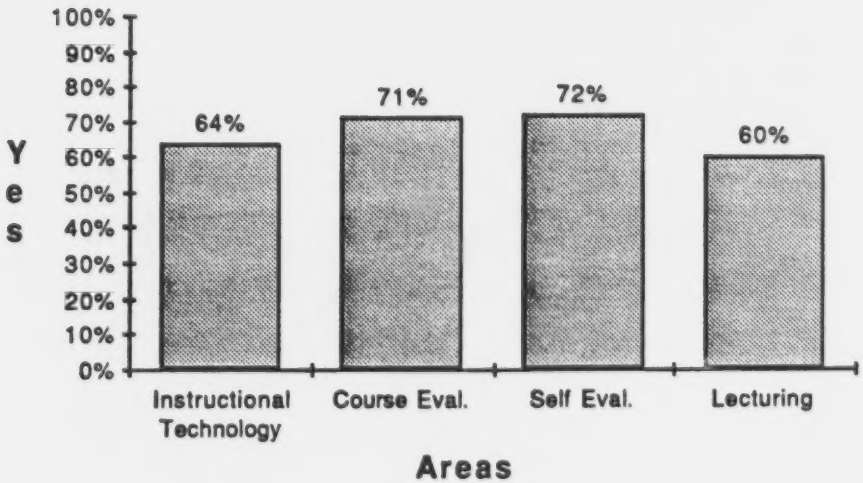
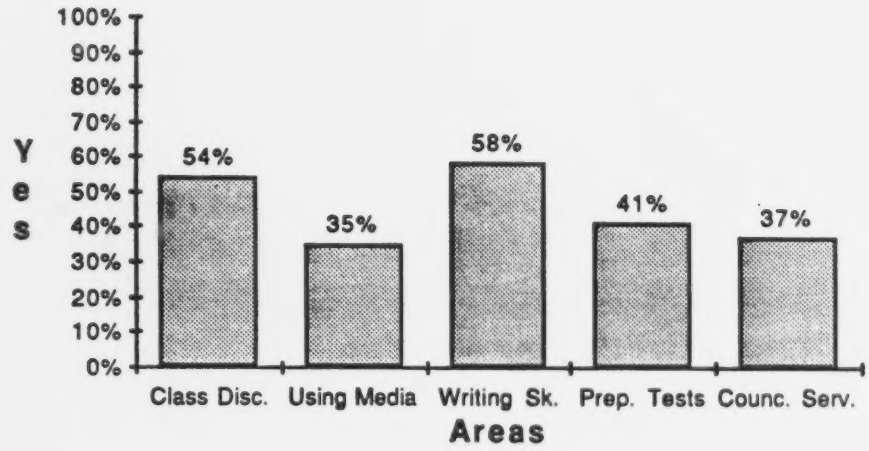


TABLE 35

HAD PREPARATION / WANT PREPARATION BY AREA

PART II

Had Preparation



Want Some/More Preparation

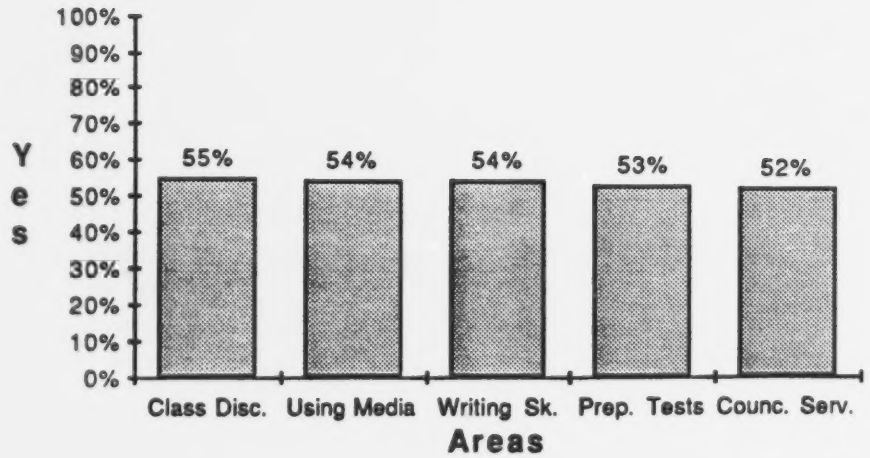
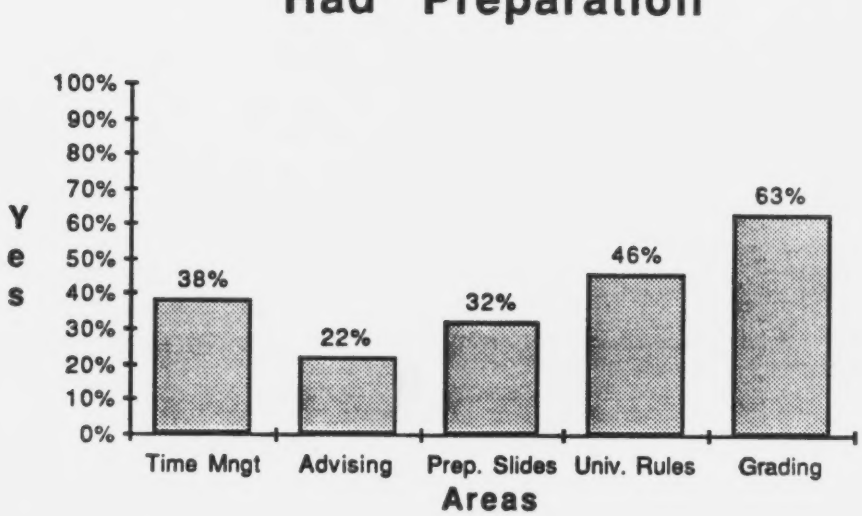
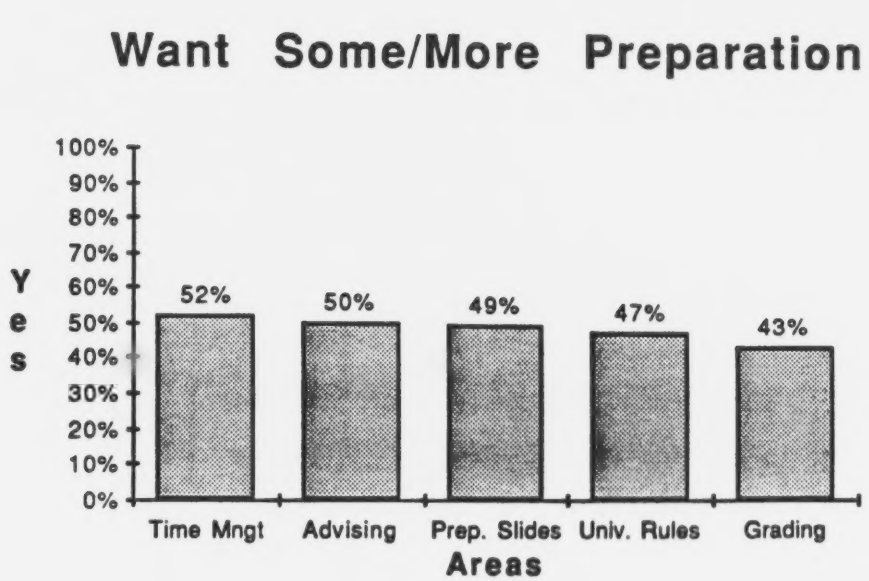


TABLE 35

HAD PREPARATION / WANT PREPARATION BY AREA

PART III





VII. Written Comments

Over one-third of the respondents (492) took the opportunity to write comments on their questionnaires. An analysis of these comments showed that six major areas accounted for over 60% of all comments (Table 35).

Need more support	20%
Inadequate time	16%
Formal program needed	14%
Inadequate pay	9%
Teaching not perceived as important	8%
Quality support program available	7%

There were substantial differences on the focus of the comments by the teaching assistants from institution to institution. Comments regarding pay were particularly apparent on two campuses (33% & 20%), inadequate time in all but two, with teaching assistants on most campuses requesting more support. On one campus 80% of all comments requested that the support program be a formal one. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the comments from another institution focused on the perceived lack of importance given to teaching.

To provide a more cohesive picture of the comments, a selection of representative comments grouped by major topics will be found in Appendix B. Although the department of the writer is identified, the comments have been edited to remove references to specific institutions.

TABLE 36

WRITTEN COMMENTS - MAJOR CATEGORIES

(BY CATEGORY AND INSTITUTION)

Number Commenting	Total 492 n (%)	A 103 n (%)	B 119 n (%)	C 87 n (%)	D 34 n (%)	E 70 n (%)	F 54 n (%)	G 15 n (%)	H 13 n (%)
I. Work load and pay									
A. inadequate pay	43 (9)	4 (4)	7 (6)	8 (9)	3 (9)	3 (4)	11(20)	5(33)	2(15)
B. inadequate time	77(16)	11(11)	22(18)	12(14)	11(32)	11(16)	4(26)	3(20)	3(23)
II. Selection & assignment									
A. more care in selection	16 (3)	2 (2)	4 (3)	1 (1)	2 (6)	2 (3)	4 (9)	1 (6)	
B. outside of strength	15 (3)	3 (3)	2 (2)	8 (9)	1 (3)	1 (1)		1 (6)	
C. responsibility not clear	6 (1)	5 (5)				1 (1)			
D. language problem	15 (3)	4 (4)	4 (3)	2 (2)	3 (9)	2 (3)			
E. want more responsibility	17 (3)	3 (3)	2 (2)	2 (2)	5(15)	2 (3)	2 (4)		1 (8)
F. great experience	17 (3)	6 (6)	4 (3)	2 (2)	5(15)				
III. Support/General									
A. more support needed	101(20)	32(31)	19(16)	15(17)	8(24)	15(21)	7(13)	2(13)	3(23))
B. support good-excellent	36 (7)	15(15)	6 (5)	5 (6)	7(21)	3 (4)			
C. supervision not needed	19 (4)	7 (7)	3 (3)	1 (1)	3 (9)	3 (4)	1 (2)		1 (8)
D. faculty variable	12 (2)	5 (5)		7 (8)					
E. teaching not important	39 (8)	6 (6)	7 (6)	10(11)	10(29)	3 (4)	2 (4)		1 (8)
F. faculty poor role model	7 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2)		1 (3)	2 (3)	1 (2)		
G. students not motivated	12 (2)	4 (4)	3 (3)		3 (9)	2 (3)			
IV. Training Program									
A. formal program needed	67(14)	11(11)	12(10)	3 (3)	7(21)	19(27)	3 (6)	12(80)	)
B. program good-excellent	31 (6)			3 (3)		3 (4)			2(15)
C. program has problems	14 (3)	5 (5)		3 (3)	2 (6)		1 (2)	1 (6)	2(15)
D. program prior to start	12 (2)			5 (4)	4(12)		3(20)		

Note: Total number of specific comments is greater than the number of TAs commenting since many respondents made more than one comment.

VIII. Observations and Recommendations

Graduate teaching assistants play a major role in most research universities. In addition to representing a large proportion of the graduate students enrolled in many academic departments, this group is responsible for much of the teaching and supervision that goes on in the initial two years of undergraduate education. Although no hard data exist, it has been estimated that from 30 to 50% of an undergraduate's contact hours in the freshman and sophomore years at research universities are with teaching assistants. What makes this estimate even more significant is that within these hours is most of the time set aside for discussion and instructional counseling.

And yet, as important as graduate assistants are to the health and well being of their institutions, the resources being dedicated to their support and training are often extremely limited. This lack of attention is even more unfortunate when we realize that it is from this population that our faculty of tomorrow will come. It was the purpose of this study to gather information about teaching assistants, the problems they faced, and the support they were given. In addition, these data could also provide a base for comparative studies at other institutions while permitting the participating universities to measure the impact of new support and training programs.

To summarize our findings:

- One of every three teaching assistants is fully responsible for a course including lecturing, grading, counseling, etc.
- Nearly half of all teaching assistants (44%) have taught previously and three out of four hope to teach after they have received their degrees.
- One out of three is new each year.

- One in twenty-five does not have the appropriate academic background for his/her assignment and one in six is teaching outside his/her discipline. In addition, more international than US TAs report being assigned outside of their discipline (77% vs 84%).
- Adequacy of time is a major problem with 25% of all women and 16% of all men reporting a problem in meeting both their teaching and academic responsibilities. The problem is particularly acute in courses where extensive grading of papers is required.
- Women (one in five) report less adequate guidance and support than men and apparently some discrimination exists on certain campuses.
- Support and supervision are inadequate for a substantial number of teaching assistants, with nearly 20% reporting a need for improved guidance.
- On a given campus, the adequacy of support and supervision varies substantially from department to department and from supervisor to supervisor.
- Support and supervision of teaching assistants is a greater problem in the traditional Arts and Sciences departments than in the professional schools.
- On most factors, there is little difference in the problem perceived by national and international teaching assistants.
- The more significant the function - lecturing, leading seminars, etc., - the less adequate is the training being provided.

Recommendations

Note: These recommendations are based on both this report and on the detailed reports provided to each participating institution.

To improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching assistants, it is recommended:

1. That all institutions relying on graduate teaching assistants survey this group on a regular basis to identify needs, the success of existing training programs, and problems both general and at the departmental level. This information can then provide the necessary data bases to study the impact of new programs as they are implemented.
2. That formal required training/orientation programs be established for all graduate teaching assistants and that elements of the program be offered prior to the start of their teaching assignments. Key areas to be included -
    - Techniques of self evaluation
    - Techniques of course evaluation
    - Uses of and developments in instructional technology
    - Improving lecturing techniques
    - Generating and directing class discussion.
3. That efforts be made to improve faculty supervision and guidance with particular attention being paid to departments within the Arts and Sciences.
4. That studies be made, on a department-by-department basis, of the workload of teaching assistants and that adjustments be made when the

time required to perform these duties is far in excess of 20 hours per week. (Special attention should be paid to those courses in which there is a heavy student writing requirement.)

5. That more care be taken in the assignment of teaching assistants, insuring that they have the required academic competency for their assignment.
6. That teaching assistants be provided, at least four weeks prior to the start of their teaching assignments, detailed information as to their responsibilities and copies of the basic course materials (text, syllabi, etc.).
7. That international students be tested for spoken language competency and that students falling below an acceptable standard not be given teaching responsibilities until this standard is met. (It is suggested that international students from significantly different educational systems have one semester or quarter of academic experience in the United States before they assume formal teaching responsibility.)
8. That, in addition to the general program for all new teaching assistants, special orientation programs be established for international teaching assistants and that these programs include:
    - information about the organization and administration of American universities;
    - information on the cultural differences they can anticipate;
    - a clarification of the role of student and teacher in American universities;

- information to assist in their general survival - banking, shopping, communications, etc.

9. That faculty assigned to supervise teaching assistants be selected for their discipline expertise, teaching effectiveness, and willingness to work with the teaching assistants in their improvement and that the importance of this supervisory role be recognized and rewarded.
10. And finally, and perhaps most important - that teaching be recognized as a significant activity at research universities and that this fact be supported by the institutional reward system.

In reading the many comments written by the participants, one is struck by the sense of dedication, concern, and hard work that permeates the responses. If the 1300 graduate assistants in our sample are truly representative, we have available to us a committed pool of talented individuals who want to be both effective teachers and successful students. It is our challenge to provide them with the support necessary to make the attainment of these goals possible.

Appendix A
Questionnaire

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
115 COLLEGE PLACE • SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 13244-4040 315/423-4571

Dear Graduate Teaching Assistant:

Recognizing the importance of the role of graduate teaching assistants/associates in providing quality instruction to its students, your institution has joined with a number of other major research universities to explore ways in which the support being provided to graduate teaching assistants/associates can be augmented. To assist us in developing a program that will be most sensitive to your needs and the needs of others serving in this role, we are asking that you complete the attached questionnaire and mail it to this office in the enclosed stamped envelope unless you have been notified otherwise.

This questionnaire has the endorsement of the United States Council of Graduate Schools, and the results will be reported to a national conference on activities for graduate teaching assistants/associates scheduled for next year. Summary data will also be provided to your institution so that improvements in your support, if needed, can be made. To protect confidentiality, our findings will not be reported on an individual departmental basis during the present academic year.

Thank you for your assistance, and we hope you are having a most successful academic year.

Ruth Christy Funk
Director, Graduate School
Syracuse University

Robert M. Diamond
Assistant Vice Chancellor,
Instructional Development
Syracuse University

NATIONAL GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT/ASSOCIATE SURVEY

conducted by

The Center for Instructional Development, Syracuse University

Your feedback is important to us as we begin to gather information concerning the needs of graduate teaching assistants/associates (TAs) across the nation. Your responses will be used to help create a national agenda on TAs and to provide feedback to your institution. Do not put your name on this form. All information will be anonymous in any reporting of group data.

A. Demographic Information

1. a. At which institution do you teach. (Circle one.) (6)

1. Oregon State University 2. University of Tennessee 3. University of Nebraska
4. Stanford University 5. Syracuse University 6. Texas A & M
7. UCLA 8. University of California, Davis

b. In which school or college do you teach? _____ (7-8)

c. What is your department? _____ (9-10)

2. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one.) (11)

1. ___ BA/BS 2. ___ MA/MS 3. ___ PhD
4. ___ Other (Please specify.) _____

3. a. Are you a United States citizen? (Check one.) ___Yes ___No (12)

b. If no, please indicate country of origin._____ (13-14)

4. How long have you been a TA? _____years _____months (15-16-17)

5. _____Male _____Female (Please check.) (18)

6. Do you plan to teach in a college or university when you complete your graduate program? (Check one.) ___Yes ___No (19)

B. Teaching Responsibilities

1. Please indicate (1) the duties for which you are responsible, by circling either Yes (Y) or No (N) for each item, and (2) if yes, your perception of the adequacy of department supervision received by circling the appropriate letter (Adequate = A; Inadequate = I).

Responsibilities	Yes/No	Supervision (if yes) Adequate/Inadequate	
a. Lecturing	Y N	A I	(20-21)
b. Teaching seminar section	Y N	A I	
c. Leading class discussion	Y N	A I	
d. Conducting review sessions	Y N	A I	
e. Preparing tests	Y N	A I	
f. Grading	Y N	A I	
g. Counseling/advising	Y N	A I	
h. Selecting course reading material	Y N	A I	
i. Leading class or seminar discussion	Y N	A I	
j. Supervising laboratories	Y N	A I	
k. Studio supervision/instruction	Y N	A I	
l. Holding office hours	Y N	A I	(42-43)
m. Other (please list) _____		A I	(44)

2. Generally, do you feel you have received adequate guidance and supervision from the department or college in which you teach? (Check one.) ____Yes ____No (45)

3. Indicate which one of the following scenarios best describes your current teaching situation by placing a check in the blank next to the response. (Please check only one response.) (46)

1. _____ Fully responsible for the course being taught

2. _____ Working directly with a single faculty member

3. _____ Working with a team of faculty and/or other graduate TAs

C. Teaching Preparation

Please circle Yes (Y) or No (N) in relation to each of the following questions about your preparation for teaching.

	Yes/No	
1. Are you teaching in an area you consider to be your discipline or specialization?	Y N	(47)
2. Do you believe your academic background is adequate for your responsibility?	Y N	
3. Do you feel that you are given enough time to adequately fulfill your teaching responsibility?	Y N	
4. a. Does your institution or department offer informal programs to support graduate teaching assistants in their instructional activities?	Y N	(50)
b. If yes, who sponsored the programs? (Check all that apply.)		(51-53)
1._____institution 2. _____school/college 3. _____department		
c. Did you participate in such a program?	Y N	(54)
5. a. Have you held a teaching position(s) other than at your current institution?	Y N	(55)
b. If yes, please indicate where else you have held a teaching position. (Check all that apply.)		(56-59)
1._____ K-12 school 2. _____ College/University 3._____ Public/Private Agency		
4._____ Other (Please specify.) _____		
6. Have you had any formal preparation in teaching?	Y N	(60)

7. For each of the following items, circle the appropriate letter to indicate (1) if you have had preparation in the area, and (2) if you would like some (or more) preparation (Yes = Y, No = N).

Areas	Have Had Preparation	Would Like (More) Preparation	
a. Counseling/advising	Y N	Y N	(61-62)
b. Knowledge of availability of counseling services	Y N	Y N	
c. Conducting classroom discussions	Y N	Y N	
d. Lecturing	Y N	Y N	
e. Preparing tests	Y N	Y N	
f. Using media	Y N	Y N	
g. Preparing your own slides and transparencies	Y N	Y N	
h. Grading procedures	Y N	Y N	
i. New developments in instructional technology	Y N	Y N	
j. University rules and regulations	Y N	Y N	(79-80)
k. How to evaluate yourself as a teacher	Y N	Y N	(6-7)
l. How to evaluate your course	Y N	Y N	
m. Developing writing skills	Y N	Y N	
n. Time management	Y N	Y N	(12-13)

D. International Teaching Assistants

Answer the following items only if you are an international student teaching assistant or associate. Others, please go to section E.

1. What training, in addition to the above, was provided to you because you are an international student? (Circle either Y or N.)

	Yes/No	
a. Orientation for international students	Y	N
b. Information about the American university	Y	N
c. Understanding cultural differences	Y	N
d. The role of the graduate teaching assistant	Y	N
e. Improving language skills	Y	N
f. The role of the student and the teacher in the American university	Y	N

(14)

g. Others (Please specify.) _____ (20)

_____ (21)

2. a. Do you feel confident that you are meeting your teaching responsibilities effectively?

____ Yes ____ No (22)

b. If not, what do you see as the major problem(s)?

(23-25)

E. ALL RESPONDENTS: Do you have any other comments and/or suggestions?

(26-30)

Please fold this form so that the address on the other side of this page is exposed. Then, staple closed and drop in the mail.

Thank you!

CID (2/86)

Appendix B

Representative Comments

A. Teaching vs Research

Many faculty do not themselves seem to have a large investment in teaching. After the TA course (taught by someone who is highly involved in teaching), I think TAs begin to pick up the apathy toward teaching exhibited by many faculty. There is also some feeling of exploitation - especially when TAs grade all term papers, etc. and receive no guidance from the professor. (Sociology)

My experience has been that the only people who care much about the needs of graduate teaching assistants are those who have the least power to do anything about it: TAs, non-tenured faculty (lecturers) who do much of the introductory undergrad teaching, and some staff members. In my department, in general, TAs are used by tenured faculty to take on as many of the responsibilities of the course as possible - including those of the professor - without appearing to violate university guidelines which are vague to begin with. Most faculty members would rather do research and many see teaching as a nuisance that they must put up with to keep their jobs. (Psychology).

Teaching is considered secondary at best, with the implication being that those who aspire to teach or who enjoy it are not good scholars or intellects. The department gives double messages about teaching. It does not want to short the undergrads, but it is suspicious of those of us who care deeply about teaching. (English)

There is no prestige or any other tangible or intangible rewards associated with being a TA in my department. Teaching is regarded as a necessary evil rather than as an honorable and important job in its own right. The only impetus to, or rewards from, good teachers come from individual effort. (Economics)

At a major research institution, good undergraduate teaching is virtually impossible. The rigorous requirements for the TAs to graduate, combined with the competitive (or ultra-competitive) nature of a prestigious university which fosters undergraduate tensions prohibits effective teaching. Given my experiences, I believe the best solution would be to have major undergraduate teaching universities and a few elite graduate research universities and not try for something in between. (Geography)

I think, in some institutions, teaching is emphasized too much to graduate students. Graduate students are here to learn mathematics and learn how to conduct their own research (if you are in a Ph.D. program). I think in many cases TA duties and teaching duties take too much part of graduate school life. Emphasis should be in research and learning mathematics. (Mathematics).

There are few rewards for teaching well, but considerable rewards for research activity - this situation prevails both for faculty members plus GTAs. Our GTAs are almost always engaged in their own coursework while teaching. Committing more time to improve teaching effectiveness is achieved at the expense of personal academic performance...a choice few GTAs will make. Finally, we get very little in the way of assistance in developing skills as teachers. (Marketing & Transportation)

The primary concern of the Management Department at this University is <u>research</u> - therefore, much less emphasis and effort is provided to graduate students (Ph.D. students) on how to be a better teacher! The teaching techniques and helpful tips for teaching have not come from professors or management department personnel but rather from peers. (Management).

In my department the faculty are so pressured to do research, teach two or more courses, and be open for students who need help that there is no time for faculty to take individual time with the TAs in order to help them overcome the problems they face from week to week as they teach. (Computer Science)

Teaching might improve in this department if good teaching was recognized as a worthwhile accomplishment. As it is, the teaching responsibility is basically allocated to the lowest priority in terms of time, thought, and commitment. (Chemistry)

Very little to no credit is given at this institution for proficiency in teaching. As with any university who sees itself as a research institution, teaching is purely a chore. I enjoy teaching and hope to continue but our young faculty are anything but inspirational! (Geology)

Basically teaching is not considered important - I like it but I'm evaluated by my research both in my department and on the job market. I'd like to improve, but if I spent more time on training, my research would suffer. (Psychology)

I feel <u>students</u> would benefit from more attention and <u>kudos</u> given to teaching responsibilities. I feel that everything I do is because I <u>personally</u> take pride in teaching but not because I receive any recognition nor encouragement for it. It is clear that my school considers teaching a chore - something graduate

students should attempt to avoid in order to concentrate on their research. I think this is a terrible attitude and results in the teaching assistantships falling not on those students who like to teach, nor equally on all students, but on those students who cannot find alternative source of income. (Geology)

The Economic Department, because of its enormous class size and the relative aloofness of the faculty from the undergraduates, puts a great deal of responsibility on TAs. Although I feel equipped for this, many of my colleagues are not. The problem may not be with TAs but with the attitude of the faculty toward the "chore" of teaching undergraduates. (Economics)

B. Remuneration

We are grossly underpaid for the full-time job we do. This causes many of us to seek (often illegal) additional employment to meet bills which then cuts into teaching preparation and coursework and research. (German & Slavic Languages)

The English TAs are paid less than any department, yet we have the largest number of students per quarter. We do, by far, the majority of teaching (by number of student hours) in the whole department, but barely get paid enough to pay rent and buy groceries. (English)

I have been extremely pleased with my TA experience: Four hours teaching per week; two office hours/week: option to sit in on professor's lecture; and $1185/month for second year TAs. It has been a good learning experience, showing me that I do in fact enjoy teaching; it has been fun from a social standpoint, making friends with most of my students; I've learned the material very completely; and I've earned decent money! If not for my experience as a TA, I would consider my graduate years a grueling drag which would have been difficult to endure. (Geography)

I believe that the time involved in this position is underestimated. The pay is not commensurate. The position carries with it a stigma of "lower class." It is tough, tiring, and time consuming. To add insult to injury the government wants a share of the TA through taxes. (Microbiology)

I think in many ways that the system here (and elsewhere for the most part) is inequitable. We live on such a small stipend for the amount of work we do. Further, those of us who teach summer school are to be losing about $124.00 next year in pay. I feel our voices are not heard. Many of us have families to support and can hardly make it on the little salary we make. Last winter, I had to go without heat three weeks in my home - all because I lacked money. I believe a teacher who is doing his or her job well cannot really prepare interesting lectures, teach

classes, meet office hours and help those students who need extra help all within 20 hrs. a week. Am I bitter? Of course. (English)

As a TA, I am considered fifty percent of the time as a language instructor, whereas I am fully responsible for the course I teach, more often than not I put in full time hours. Too bad the salary doesn't reflect that. (Spanish & Portuguese)

Financially, the support is also very good relative to the amount of time and effort required of me! I would like to get some feedback from the department concerning student evaluations of my performance - both good and bad! (Electrical and Computer Engineering)

C. Training Programs and Support

The faculty member I work under is burnt out, doesn't give grad students adequate support - and doesn't have to because he has tenure. In one way, it's to our advantage because we get to develop our own courses and teaching methods. On the other hand, it's very frustrating when you are constantly improvising in the classroom without adequate feedback from an experienced teacher. (Social Science)

The TAs in our program are given great support, fourteen of us work with one faculty member. We meet formally once a week and informally very frequently. We receive a great deal of respect from faculty and students. (Law)

All in all my experience as a teacher's assistant was of great value to me personally and I hope for my professor, my department, and for my students. I have nothing but utmost respect for all the faculty in my department who were always available when I needed assistance. (Art)

I could certainly do better in teaching and handling my other responsibilities as a graduate student with a little more support from the department. (Biology)

Our department does an adequate job of teacher training for new T.A.s. What would help is some sort of continuation - a chance for interested (i.e., not a requirement) TAs to participate in an organized, informal, ongoing dialogue about teaching methods and problems. Also, our department has the (unique?) problem of faculty members having widely varying ideas of the TA role and some standardization would be desirable. (Geography)

In general, my teaching "experience" has been very positive and has been one of the highlights of my education here thus far. I have found the Department to be very supportive in introducing new TAs into the system. To some extent, I feel part of a "TA

community" (we get a newsletter, announcements, luncheon, etc.) and my value as a TA is felt by the Department. (This has definitely helped!) (Psychology)

My department requires a one-quarter seminar for all TAs which teaches basic teaching skills. When I was enrolled in this class several years ago, I found it extremely useful and still use the skills that I learned then (in addition to new ones). I think other departments could learn from Biology - we pride ourselves on the quality of the Biology Department's teaching assistants! (Biology)

The department of Spanish and Portuguese conducts an excellent and highly effective training program for its new TAs. While sufficient and constant supervision is provided, appropriate responsibility is assumed by the TAs . We work well together and faculty and staff are always available to help and are open to suggestions. I find the TA experience challenging and rewarding. (Spanish & Portuguese)

The TA preparation program (which was voluntary) seemed to be geared more toward people who already had experience. The Chemistry Department program (which was mandatory) was excellent and the department gives a lot of support, advice, and feedback to the TAs. (Chemistry)

Departments should sponsor informal discussion about teaching in the specific department, about expectations, materials, course fee money, etc. Felt I was set adrift at first, had to do all the information gathering myself, or go by intuition. (Visual Communication)

The department offers very minimal programs to assist teaching assistants, but none of these programs come close to reflecting the reality of a classroom situation. To nearly all the TAs these programs are a joke. Moreover, TAs who teach divergent ethnic groups in fields that reflect that particular group's interests must be more sensitive to the students needs, often taking a different approach. I presently teach African history and, as an African-American TA, I have been treated with greater respect than the white professor who teaches the class. Finally, I would have liked to see questions concerning the selection process. I am the only black TA in the entire History Department, despite the large number of black graduate students. (History)

Most composition TAs actually study literature, and resist attempts to connect the two. As a result, most are utterly uninformed about current pedagogy. A mandatory composition theory class once offered by the English Department has recently been made optional at the urging of the students. All this goes to prove, I believe, that the teaching of composition should interest

and involve all departments, not just English, and that teacher training in this field should involve a university-wide program. (English)

I feel that the individual departments should arrange for the TAs to attend bi-weekly seminars on teaching methods. Our university is organized such that the institution offers seminars to those interested, but the specific departments do not promote attendance at these meetings. I believe that if the seminars were specifically set up by each department and if the TAs of that department were encouraged (required?) to attend, then the university teaching instructional facilities would be used more effectively. (Mechanical Engineering)

I feel isolated from the people with creative ideas and sometimes feel I've been inadequately prepared to teach composition. (English)

We seem to have a very good TA program (from a TA's point of view): we (our department) have a training program which still requires some fine tuning but it has potential. Held in the Fall, all are required to participate if new: the problem is with those who come in later than that time and must TA without the benefit of the "helpful hints" offered by the program. The University also offers a short training program, required by all TAs. Not bad for the new TA. (History)

It would be great if the Department offered a course in teaching chemistry or some kind of formal training. (Chemistry)

We are lucky in the English Department to participate in an extensive teaching program. Since we are not only expected to work as TAs but also as instructors of Freshman English, the department has a series of pedagogy courses which we are expected to take. I have found this arrangement invaluable and I recommend it as an interesting model. (English)

Our English department has an extensive pedagogy class before we teach Freshman English - this course focuses on the material of teaching writing (which is helpful) but not really on class dynamics, teaching effectiveness, etc. What I have learned has primarily been from other TAs as we grope our way through. I would have liked more preparation in creating useful writing assignments, in-class exercises (other than discussion) and other creative ways to teach writing. We are instructed in marking and grading papers and using handouts, but not in ways to make the material interesting to students. We all find (or don't find) our own way — sharing successes would help a lot. I think our English pedagogy course means well, but doesn't hit the hard parts. (English)

As for teaching - our department believes in throwing us in the deep end with little or no preparation. (Economics)

When I started teaching here I was given the textbook I was to use by one of the other Grad students on the Friday just prior to the Monday that I started teaching. I didn't even see any of the faculty members prior to starting my teaching here. All of our TAs are treated in this manner. We are not given any guidance. (Civil Engineering)

Not enough time spent with the TAs going over the laboratory experiments. It is assumed that the TAs are familiar with all operations and procedures in the experiments. (Geology)

TAs learn by example from their professors, this is perpetrating poor college level teaching. (Management)

No information was made available to me about my teaching assignment until one week before I began actually teaching. As a result I was unable to prepare and was behind before I even began. (Art)

We had no opportunity to have practical experience before we began teaching, and had to put together two-credit courses with only the barest guidelines given to us beforehand. It is absurd. (English)

I never was taught how to teach before I came here, and my education here on this subject was limited to two classes. I'm not excusing my own inadequacies, but I wish I had started out in support of another teacher and had that teacher support me when I taught. As it was, I was placed into a classroom with full responsibility to prepare and conduct and teach everything in a field I had no formal training in (composition). I feel I let my students down while I learned how to teach. (English)

My department offers training only during the first quarter that one actually begins to teach in the fall. I think it would be useful if training could be provided in the spring before one's teaching term begins. (History)

I have taught in three departments here: only in my current one have I received training and supervision. Ironically this comes after twelve years of teaching experience at a time when I'm qualified to teach others. I find that generally TAs are put into classrooms with the "model professor" image as their only guide and their own student load as their only experience. Unfortunately, this is all their professors had to go on. (Composition)

Teacher training here is perfunctory at best. I was thrown into a classroom after a few fuzzy lectures on the importance of taking the job seriously but with little idea of how to proceed, other than my memories of good and bad teachers I had had as an undergrad. This didn't help much; only experience did, but my first set of students suffered. Not that the university seemed to care...(History)

I feel that TAs in my department are literally thrown to the wolves. I think it is necessary to be given supervision and guidance through your first quarter. I believe that this could be accomplished by having a meeting for new TAS sponsored by the department in which experienced TAs and faculty member(s) told them what they needed to know. How to conduct a class, set up syllabus, games to be played, goals, etc. Through this shared information, the TA would feel more prepared. I had to do this on my own. (Dramatic Art)

I should have had time to review the material for the course with the instructor before the semester began. (Chemistry)

Since I am a foreign GTA, it would be a great help to understand the cultural differences which sometimes lead to a lot of confusion and misunderstanding in the class. Understanding the psychology of an average college student would really help a lot while I am teaching in the classroom. (Computer Science)

I would have been less anxious during my first few months if I had known exactly what my duties were to be. (Computer Science)

The first time I taught, I had had no preparation from either the university or my department. The format was not even made clear. I had to ask other students who had taught the course before about how the course was organized. (Mathematics)

A structured one-week or weekend seminar for future TAs at the beginning of the year could provide a lot of instruction and help. Also, a peer group of TAs or exchange of experiences would be good. (History)

In my first quarter, I taught a qualitative organic lab. Instrumentation differed significantly from what I had used before, and neither instruction nor sufficient time was allowed to become familiar with the (sometimes home-made) equipment; I had to teach the day after I was given course materials. In the same course, TAs were given physical data for the students unknowns, but not the structure, so we were often unable to explain anomalous behavior adequately. (Chemistry)

D. Selection and Assignment

I teach a foreign language and am not sure how or why I was chosen for the job. I'm doing quite well, but some of my co-workers don't speak the language very correctly. It seems there is not enough quality control in the choice of T.A.'s. (Spanish and Portuguese)

I strongly feel Graduate Assistants should be carefully screened and interviewed. Although I feel competent in fulfilling my teaching duties I did receive my Assistantship via the U.S. Post Office. (Communications)

Zeal for conveying knowledge should be the major criterion for selecting graduate students to be TAs, not financial aid! (Civil Engineering)

The first time I taught the class I had had one class in the area, I was just one step ahead of my students. (Management)

E. Supervision and Support

In general, the professors are not involved in the TAs sections and often not even in the grading. Sometimes it doesn't matter - they just get to be a pain in the neck anyway. (Economics)

This institution does not tell its TA how to run their classes. This is a good thing. We are compelled to devise:

1. Our own methods
2. Our own criteria of evaluation

This makes for more creative classes. (Dance)

I believe the less regimented and the less regulated the teaching profession is, the more it will remain a viable service to education. (English)

Giving students (especially those who plan to teach) the opportunity to TA with a great deal of responsibility for their own material is one of this institution's strong points. (Art History)

We have a successful TA program here because our director delegates responsibility, manages humanely and expects perfection. (English)

If anything, there may be too much "supervision" here the first two quarters of teaching! The structure is such that one feels monitored rather than supported. (English)

As the name implies, a T.A. is just a teaching "assistant." Therefore the responsibility of successful teaching lies in a large part in the faculty member who is teaching a course. A teaching assistant cannot and should not take the place of a competent instructor. (Engineering)

I have had two assistantships in psychology:
Position #1. I had so much responsibility and almost no supervision. I lectured, made up, graded homework and tests. Was responsible for six recitation sections.
Position #2. I'm working closely with one faculty member who offers me close supervision if I want, or lets me do what I want. It's great. He's always there to help me. I feel more competent in this position. (Psychology)

Supervision of TAs highly variable depending on the faculty member teaching the corresponding lecture course. (Geology)

My department allows me complete control of my class (course). I prepare my own lectures and decide what material I will cover. I appreciate the independence I am given in teaching. This is not to indicate lack of supervision, however. Other professors who teach the same course are willing to give advice and suggestions. My departmental chairman is tremendously supportive and inquires frequently about any problem or successes I'm having in my teaching. (Geography)

No one (faculty) has ever observed my teaching and given me suggestions or checked up on me. (Physical Education)

I feel it is important to the first time teaching assistant to feel he/she has the support and confidence of the faculty. Informal gatherings with experienced teaching faculty and inclusion in faculty activities committees can only improve the assistant teachers performance. (Architecture)

Most of the supervising professors whom I have taught for have been fairly devoted and satisfactory teachers; however, this was due largely to my selection of professors - I avoided those who had a poor reputation as teachers. (Chemistry)

The first two courses I Ta'd went well - though I had no experience and was told to basically sink or swim, I felt as if I had a measure of control over the content and direction of the course. My current TA duties are far less positive - we have no input into the structure or content of the course, and/or suggestions (even students' suggestions relayed through us) are received defensively or not at all. Like I said, it varies a lot. (Sociology)

I can do whatever I want in the class I teach. This is helpful and allows freedom, but there should be more accountability. (Mechanical Engineering)

A commitment to teaching must begin with the Department and Professor. I was a TA for a course which the Department hardly cares about, taught by a professor upset about his treatment. His materials were so filled with typos that I played more the role interpreter than teacher. His method of lecturing was to flash transparencies on PH.D. level physics rapidly past college juniors. (Engineering)

TAships in general are unsupervised positions. I have had TA evaluations made by professors who never set foot in my discussion/lab sections - and they've commented on my teaching style and abilities! Professors should be required to spend more time with their TAs. All too often teaching is a burden the professors don't cheerfully accept. This attitude is picked up by the students and the TA is often caught in the middle. TAs need some form of evaluation - that carries weight. (Zoology)

I feel supervision is inadequate. I came to this position with eight years teaching experience, some come with none. I feel supervision would be helpful in several ways. It would give us support and a source for future recommendations. Quality supervision would also expand and improve an individual's teaching skills. It could also help us to clarify our own thoughts about teaching and help us to pinpoint our objectives beyond coping with the next day's lecture. (Mathematics)

The department has no system of supervision for graduate TAs. The philosophy is more of "learn how to do it by doing it" approach. (Psychology)

It seems as though graduate students who teach here have no supervision whatsoever and that this is a dangerous practice at best. I have now taught seven classes (500 students) and I have never been observed by, checked-up-on, or talked to any faculty members about any classes taught. (Statistics)

TAs are saddled with complex laboratory responsibilities, deciphering material inappropriate for undergraduates, and are often given too much blame by both students and faculty when labs/discussions didn't go well. (Physical Education)

I'm not always sure what my role is as a TA. I would like more feedback from the teacher as to how I'm coming across to students, and what the expectations are. (Art)

1. The educational goals for a given class ought to be clearly specified. In my experience, I am left to decide these for myself.

2. The standards by which we measure students should be clearly articulated, even if they are subjectively defined.

In general, TAs are given almost complete latitude in defining and evaluating curricular standards. This laissez-faire doctrine can only work if the quality of the TAs is uniformly high. I am not sure that the average TA is up to such a level of ability and responsibility. (English)

Role needs stronger definition by the supervising faculty, i.e. clearer delineation of responsibilities to avoid providing conflicting stories to students. (Psychology)

The course I have taught for the past two years has been officially assigned to three different professors in the University time schedule, and none of those professors took any type of leadership position in the teaching of that course. I learned to be an effective teacher from learning from my own mistakes. (Chemistry)

F. Selected Other Comments

I feel that I do not get enough responsibility. I have been here for four semesters, yet I'm still doing the level of work that I was when I came. I guess I'm anxious to advance. (Nutrition)

If it was not for all of the TAs sticking together, I doubt that we could graduate before our first nervous breakdown. (Home Economics)

We, as teaching assistants, have had little opportunity to present ideas and suggestions about the course to the professors. Rarely do they elicit such comments. I would like to see a formal evaluation process established so the TA can inform the professor of what works and what doesn't. (Political Science)

Students often complain that their foreign TAs can barely understand or speak English. This seems unfair to the students. It seems like there should be some kind of interview where a TA's ability to communicate should be assessed. (Zoology)

After teaching some sections on my own, I almost resent someone trying to tell me how to teach something. TAs see education from both sides of the desk and are more in touch with students. As an undergrad, in many situations it may be a better educational experience to take the class from a TA. We may be short on experience, but we make up for it in concern, enthusiasm, and hard work. (Finance)

It is nice to know somebody is interested in us. (Industrial Engineering)

Time and office space are the biggest problems. If there were meetings, could I go? Maybe not. Indeed to add - they do supply pedagogy courses whose quality is very good, but no one wants to take them. Teaching is not what one is hired for, is it? Always to be defeated by the great grey glacier which demands we teach very well something they hold in low esteem. Whew! I needed that. (English)